An interpretive study of student-centred learning through constructivist, humanist and socio-cultural lenses

Thesis

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Abstract

The notion of student-centred learning is ubiquitous in the pedagogic literature, in learning and teaching statements of universities, and within course documentation. However it is not often defined, and an informal investigation of university staff revealed a variety of conflicting interpretations. This ambiguity is problematic for academic developers, and so warranted further investigation through literature review and interviews with academic staff from the researcher's university.

The literature review revealed diversity in understanding, and on examination, ideas were underpinned by a range of perspectives on learning *per se*. Three different perspectives, namely constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism were examined for their respective alignment and value in thinking about student-centred learning. Many interpretations were within a constructivist framework, others more aligned with humanist or socio-cultural perspectives. The term *student-centred learning* was also used in association with contemporary ideas such as employability, widening participation and social justice.

A constructivist grounded approach was used to collect data through interviews with lecturers teaching in art and design, and transcripts considered from the three perspectives above. It is argued in the findings that although constructivist interpretations of student-centred learning dominate the literature, other perspectives are also evident in the conceptions and practice of the group interviewed, and incorporation of these offered a more appropriate approach to contemporary issues in higher education, especially in building a partnership approach between lecturers and students. It is suggested that technicist approaches, though often based within

constructivism, may have caused the proliferation of a 'slogan' approach to the student-centred learning discourse. Finally, in the context of the researcher's own professional practice, it is argued that academic development programmes focused on underlying values and discussion of individual ideology would provide a more critical perspective on notions such as student-centred learning and a way forward as we consider further ideas for change.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Introduction to the chapter

This thesis investigates university lecturers' conceptions of student-centred learning. In this introductory chapter I wish to:

- outline the professional context for the research
- outline the impetus for the research
- discuss the political context
- justify the scope of the research
- state the research questions addressed in this thesis
- outline how the thesis will be presented

The professional context

I am employed within a learning and teaching development unit in a post-1992 university in Wales, primarily as programme director for a Higher Education Academy accredited Post-graduate Certificate. The Certificate is part of probation for new academic staff with limited prior teaching experience in higher education; it also attracts a significant number of non-probationary academic staff, and academic-related staff such as careers advisers, library staff, learning development staff and technical demonstrators. The university sees itself as primarily a teaching university, but with an increasingly significant research base. I have not named the institution in this thesis to

protect as much as possible the anonymity of the research participants, and will hereafter call it Celtic University.

The impetus for the research

The idea for this research project coalesced over some time. As programme director of the PgC, I had been engaged in conversations about the nature of student-centred learning, and this question had also been raised within quality assurance events in the institution such as validation and review, as well as other academic development work. What was apparent was that others' understandings didn't necessarily have the same focus as mine. One example was the idea of students as customers; I had significant unease with the prospect of responding to market demand, and the ensuing downgrading of quality that might eventuate. In November-December 2006, I conducted an email snapshot survey of staff in the university who were asked to respond to the question *"What do you understand by student-centred learning?"* Staff invited to respond included academic staff, staff in student services, accommodation, finance, strategy office and others. It is unknown how many staff were approached as the message was cascaded, but there were 29 respondents. The range of responses is indicated by the following examples taken as excerpts to give the reader a sense of this range:

- All activities revolve around our key asset and customer
- Learning by doing, rather than just listening and performing certain tasks and regurgitating facts
- Learning is reflective and experiential
- Students work things out for themselves
- A means of empowering the student to self-learn
- Whether the student has learnt what they need to learn

- Through such means as independent research, problem solving, creative thinking, enquiry, investigation
- Delivering what the student expects from the course
- Self-directed study
- Teacher as facilitator of learning rather than transmitter of information
- Setting joint learning outcomes with students
- To fit with students' lives, so they can attend a course and work part-time.

Though this survey was limited in terms of research rigour, and had limited responses, it did highlight that understandings of student-centred learning were not universal. Some were certainly connected to learning: learning by doing; reflective and experiential learning; problem solving; and enquiry. Other comments were more focused on a customer model: centreing our activities around the student, delivering what the student expects (both of which are themselves ambiguous), and fitting in around students' part-time jobs. Given that student-centred learning as a term appears in our learning and teaching strategy (to be discussed more fully later), this disparity of understanding posed a challenge. It highlighted the conflicting messages that staff are receiving, perhaps from colleagues, from government policy, or from the literature, and conflicting understandings has significant professional relevance in my role as an academic developer.

I decided therefore to investigate conceptions of student-centred learning more fully through this research project by interviewing academic staff within the university. At the outset, I wondered whether differences may be apparent from discipline to discipline, and whether and to what extent learning *per se* was distinctly different across the disciplines. I therefore initially intended to approach research participants

from three very different disciplines: a course from art and design, humanities and sciences respectively, and collected some data from both humanities and art and design in the early stages of the research. However as the project progressed, the scope of the research became more focused. I became increasingly interested in how student-centred learning linked with different *conceptions* of learning, and this has provided the conceptual framework for the research project, and as will be discussed, focusing on art and design offered me an ideal opportunity to consider this. I also became aware of the tensions within the political rhetoric between say economic drivers such as employability and social drivers such as widening access (e.g. Welsh Assembly Government, 2009) and the relationships between these, and began to appreciate student-centred learning within this context.

As an introduction to the thesis and to contextualise the environment in which student-centred learning is being discussed, I would now like to consider the political context and its potential drivers. I will then provide a rationale for the eventual scope of the project, and outline how the thesis will be presented.

Challenges facing universities

There is evidence that UK universities have changed over the last 50 years. Barnett (1994) claims the point of departure was the Robbins report (1963 cited in Barnett, 1994), which cemented a move in universities from a cultural *raison d'être* to a means of enhancing economic development and employment advantage. This was followed by other significant milestones including the 1988 White Paper, *Employment for the 1990s* (the Fowler report) (HM Government, 1988) which sought to address skills shortages by enhancing significantly and strategically the available industrial training, and the *Further and Higher Education Act (1992)* (HM Government, 1992), which

centralised funding and quality assurance mechanisms for further and higher education, and enabled 35 polytechnics to become universities. Employers' influence on the type of advanced and vocational education offered increased, and both the above mobilised the desired increase in adult participation in education (Hillage *et al.*, 2000).

At the same time and especially after another major prompt, the Dearing report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, NCIHE, 1997), universities were encouraged to increasingly move the focus of their teaching to the world of work, and to diversify teaching methods to accommodate a broader spectrum of students including mature students, and students with a variety of cultural backgrounds and varying learning abilities. Dearing identified again the need to encourage more participation in higher education: to maintain Britain's competitive edge, to ensure in the coming decades that the working population would be able to respond to a rapidly changing work environment, and to encourage a learning culture within the population. He stressed the enriching, inclusive and democratic benefits of a learning society and reiterated higher education's role as "fundamental to the social, economic and cultural health of the nation" (NCIHE, 1997, p 8). These ideas of emancipation and democracy are central to some writers' conception of student-centred learning and are discussed later in the literature review, but it is perhaps worth noting here, that this is alongside an argument for continued economic development in Britain.

Dearing also stated that teaching would have to change, emphasising for example active learning as an approach that encourages deep understanding; practical and authentic experience that accustoms students to the demands of work; and transferable skills such as communication. He talks about putting "students at the

centre of the learning and teaching process" (NCIHE, 1997, p 114), and about teaching as an enabling process, enabling students to learn more about themselves as learners and manage their own learning, with a view to them being lifelong learners. Though not specific about particular teaching methodologies that achieve the above, he states learners need "the opportunity to engage in 'learning conversations' with staff and other students" (NCIHE, 1997, p 115). Though not using the term student-centred learning *per se*, he like many others discussed in the literature review, posed the above ideas as an alternative to transmission models of teaching, and many of Dearing's ideas are evident in others' views of student-centred learning discussed later. The quality of the student experience and that of teaching has again been raised more recently with the Browne report (2010) which reviewed funding and financing of higher education in England, and will be discussed again later in this chapter.

Student numbers have increased over the last 30 years. Between 1979 and 1999 the proportion of 18-19 year olds in higher education moved from 12% to 32% (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2001 cited in Gosling, 2003) and further targets for participation have been set. Before the 2000 election, the government announced a 50% target for 18-19 year olds by 2010 (BBC, 2002). This has not yet been reached, and the notion of targets has been criticised as lowering the standards for higher education (e.g. BBC, 2010a). The changes to higher education and student support being introduced by the current coalition government may also deter many prospective students as fees are raised to £9000 per annum in many universities. It has also been suggested that the government may have to limit numbers further as the spiralling cost of servicing the resultant student loans is realised (Curtis & Vasagar, 2011).

However, the desired widening access to universities has resulted in a much more diverse population of students including mature students, students from different ethnic and religious groups, more students with disabilities, and students from poorer backgrounds (Gosling, 2003). Many students though arrive without the "cultural capital" (Gosling, 2003, p 162) which enable them to integrate easily into a higher education culture, and indeed without the skills to manage the learning *per se*.

Some governments have tried to be explicit about the direction they wished universities to go. For example, in Wales universities were encouraged and to varying extent incentivised through additional funding to engage students in work experience and transferability of skills. The Work Experience and Employability Plans requested of Welsh institutions by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) from 2000 to 2003 inclusive (e.g. HEFCW, 2000) became key drivers for universities to encourage more accredited work-based learning, generic skills development, and to increase the provision and status of careers education.

Less obvious moves towards the world of work include encouragement to engage students in peer learning and peer assessment, and in problem-based learning. Through doing so it could be argued, the teacher-student relationship changes from the traditional cultural exchange to a learning environment more similar to the workplace.

So, in terms of the focus of this research, we as academic developers, lecturers and university managers are faced with political drivers which are sometimes competing. On the one hand governments are driving widening participation and increasing engagement with education in an effort to reduce the inequitable access to an

improved standard of living and thus address social justice agendas as evident in the Dearing report (NCIHE, 1997). However, at the same time universities are increasingly facing economic constraints, and expected to do more for less. There are also drivers for individual employability (e.g. NCIHE, 1997), but does that match with economic development needs which, if contingent on feedback from current employers, may be quite short term? This has provided the backdrop for this thesis, and some of these tensions will be discussed throughout the thesis.

Higher education strategy in Wales

Since devolution in 1998, Wales has had the power to make its own decisions about the strategic direction of higher education through a devolved budget for education. Wales has as suggested above, its own funding council, HEFCW, which administers strategy and funding of higher education on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG). Though influenced by initiatives across the border in England, for example, the recent Browne report (2010), Wales has its own particular agenda, and for the purposes of this thesis, I am going to examine the latest driver for change, *For our future*, published by the Welsh Assembly Government in November 2009 (WAG, 2009).

Like the UK as a whole, Wales has had a massive shift in numbers attending university, and has experienced a similar explosion in part-time enrolments (Jones, 2009). The Jones report (Jones, 2009) commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and which preceded *For our future* (WAG, 2009) identified a number of challenges for Wales; I will focus on those pertinent to this thesis. The first is access to higher education. It was noted in the report that 27% of the Welsh population were qualified to Level 4 or above against the Credit Qualifications Framework for Wales, an

increase of 1% since 2005 and in line with targets set since devolution, but still lagging behind the UK as a whole, and behind other leading Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. There remain significant areas of low participation, low skills and limited opportunities particularly in the South Wales Valleys (Jones, 2009).

The second area noted in the report (Jones, 2009) was that though Welsh graduates' employment record was good, there remained concerns from employers that graduates were not sufficiently prepared for work. The third point I would like to highlight from the report was the commitment of the authors to the wider impact of an educated population than one focused on economic benefits. They noted that though there has been acknowledgment that "learning is for life" (p 10) by the Welsh Assembly Government, the focus of the benefits of higher education has largely been economic. The report served as a reminder to the Welsh Assembly Government of the cultural and civic benefits of higher education.

In response, *For our future* (WAG, 2009) marked out key areas for strategic development in higher education. If anything, *For our future* (WAG, 2009) spelt out to even greater extent, the desired focus on issues related to social capital as much as human capital agendas. Jane Hutt, the Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, in her opening statement identified two One Wales themes of "social justice and supporting a buoyant economy" (WAG, 2009, p 2), and these ideas pervade the document. Statements such as "transform[ing] people's lives through learning" (p 1), "maxim[ising] intellectual and personal fulfilment" (p 3), and a "democratic, civilised and inclusive society" (p 3) demonstrate a sense, not just of the economic benefits of individual learning, but the impact this has on one's sense of

achievement, self-esteem and well-being. This is tempered or augmented by economic objectives including knowledge exploitation feeding into business in Wales, and continued commitment to ensuring Welsh graduates are well prepared for the workplace.

Student-centredness is mentioned as part of the vision statement in *For our future* (WAG, 2009), and used in conjunction with flexible and accessible provision. Though not defined, if one considers this document alongside the Jones report (Jones, 2009), this might suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government sees student-centred learning as enabling greater access to those in disadvantaged regions, those who wish to study part-time and those already in work.

What is evident is that the Welsh Assembly Government is looking beyond what Robeyns (2006) calls the "personal and collective instrumental economic roles" (p 71) of higher education toward both collective and personal non-economic benefits. Though there does seem to be relative emphasis on economic markers as measures of success (for example, the percentage of the population with particular skill levels), there is also a sense that the Welsh Assembly Government wishes to take education to the people rather than the other way around, thus indicating a move away from human capital models to perhaps a more inclusive capability model (Robeyns, 2006; Walker, 2003).

Common across many reports into higher education in both England and Wales is an emphasis on quality teaching to maximise the benefits students gain from higher education. Both the Jones report (2009) and *For our future* (WAG, 2009) in Wales

emphasise this, and the Browne report (2010) explicitly states higher education funding in England would be contingent on universities ensuring all new academic staff undertake a Higher Education Academy-accredited teaching qualification. This is already the case in Celtic University where, as stated earlier, the PgC is built into probation requirements for most new appointees. Browne (2010) also recognised the potential development of the UK Professional Standards Framework discussed below to accredit universities' continuing professional development provision for teaching staff. To a large extent, these sentiments are echoed in the actions of Welsh universities, and Celtic University has demonstrated a commitment to developing both new and existing teaching staff.

The Higher Education Academy and the UK Professional Standards Framework

The Higher Education Academy as a body and through its subject centres has also formed part of the political landscape. The Academy sees its role as sharing good practice for the benefit of individuals and universities as a whole, and appears to have the student learning experience at its heart (Higher Education Academy, 2011). Though the subject centres have been disbanded over the last year, the Higher Education Academy website remains a major repository of pedagogic resources categorised both by subject and housed within subject areas of the website, and by theme. It is often the first port of call for new academic staff considering developments in their practice, not least because as stated above, it is the primary accrediting body for courses such as the PgC *Teaching in Higher Education* for which I am programme director. The material housed on the website has been considered in the literature review.

Accreditation of post-graduate certificates targeted at new academic staff is against the UK Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2006) which I will now consider with respect to how it addresses student-centred learning. Several years ago a consultative process was undertaken between the following organisations: Higher Education Academy; the funding bodies for Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively; Universities UK, a group made up of vice-chancellors throughout the UK; and Guild HE, a body promoting "institutional diversity and distinctness" (Guild HE, 2008, p 1) amongst UK universities. The purpose was to develop a set of standards applicable to those teaching and supporting learning within higher education. The UK Professional Standards Framework (UK PSF) was the result, a framework with three standard descriptors, that of Associate, applicable to those with limited teaching hours, or limited teaching portfolio; Fellow, applicable to most academic staff and generally seen as *the* standard for lecturers; and a third unnamed standard more appropriate for those leading and mentoring other academic staff. The UK PSF is undergoing a review at the moment; it has been proposed that these will be augmented by a further even higher standard which appears to target senior university managers leading change in their respective universities. Since these have not been finalised, I will in this thesis concentrate on the standards as they are at present.

The UK PSF is significant, not least because it is against these standards that post-graduate certificates for new academic staff like the one for which I am programme director are accredited, and this process is undertaken with the Higher Education Academy. The framework itself is presented essentially as a set of values which are considered appropriate for staff in higher education, including valuing students as individuals, valuing learning communities, and promoting equality and diversity, all within the framework of a lecturer's day to day tasks of planning, teaching and

assessment. Student-centred learning is not specifically stated, but there is certainly a sense that the standards have been written with students in mind, and have acknowledged the differing needs of students, the differing requirements of teaching and learning depending on the discipline, diversity and equality issues in higher education, and have emphasised the student as an individual. Primarily though, what comes across is the expected commitment of teaching staff to be engaged in both discipline and pedagogic research, and to be reflexive in their practice throughout their career.

So, the Higher Education Academy through its website, and the UK PSF through its use in accrediting post-graduate certificates and university continuing professional development programmes have some influence on learning and teaching. As stated, articles from the website have been examined in the literature review. I will now consider the strategic approach to student-centred learning from the university's perspective.

The university's strategic documents

The term student-centred learning pervades university mission statements and learning and teaching strategies including our own. Part of our mission statement states that we aim:

> "to provide student-centred learning opportunities that are accessible, flexible, inclusive, lifelong and of the highest quality" (Celtic University, 2007, p 11),

and though there is no definitive statement about what student-centredness is in either the mission statement or the specific objectives within the learning and teaching

strategy for 2007-2010 (Celtic University, 2007), there are indications within the aims of our strategy of what the author understands by student-centred learning which include:

> "to ensure that students have access to high quality support and guidance that allows them to develop into active autonomous learners" (p 7)

and

> "to develop a learner oriented approach to assessment ... that contributes to learning and provides valuable and effective feedback for students" (p 7).

At approximately the same time, a briefing (Celtic University, ca. 2007-08) was sent to the university governors which defined student-centred learning as:

> "focusing on the needs of the student, rather than those of others involved in the educational process, such as teachers and administrators" (Celtic University, ca. 2007-08, Slide 3),

which though moving the focus to the student, could be construed as reactive and something for which teachers predominantly take responsibility. The briefing however continued more convincingly to suggest that this included increased student autonomy, responsibility and reflexivity, an active learning environment, and emphasis on deep learning. Also suggested was more reflexivity on the part of the teacher, and a mutual respect between learner and teacher.

At the present time, the university is undergoing a consultative process regarding its next learning and teaching strategy. HEFCW released its latest circular (HEFCW, 2010) requesting strategies from all Welsh universities in December 2010; it has built on *For our future* (WAG, 2009) discussed earlier, and again stressed social justice and

supporting a buoyant economy. In current straitened times, the strategy also, in more strident terms than previous strategy requests, emphasises more regionalisation and rationalisation of provision.

In summary, it appears evident that alongside economic drivers, there is in Wales' government policy and that of Celtic University mindfulness of the benefits of education to enhance personal well-being, cultural awareness, and generally to build a more democratic society. It is with this in mind that I undertake this research project.

Scope of the research project

As stated above, through the literature review, consideration of the political context, and the first interviews with staff I became increasingly interested in how conceptions of student-centred learning linked with conceptions of learning *per se*. It was evident that much of the contemporary pedagogic literature rejected traditional transmission methods of teaching, and this was echoed by social policy. Constructivist pedagogies predominated in the literature, however relatively narrow cognitive constructivist ideas did not fully reflect the social justice-driven agendas of policy nor did they necessarily dominate the ideas generated by the first interviews. I therefore undertook to consider student-centred learning within the framework of three conceptions of learning, namely constructivism, humanism and socio-cultural perspectives. This broadening of perspective to include humanist and socio-cultural lenses offered the opportunity to fully unpack the notion of student-centred learning in a contemporary higher education environment and has enabled a much richer appreciation of the notion.

It became obvious in early interviews that the complexities of teaching in an art and design environment in particular offered a broader scope for exploring these ideas in detail than perhaps other disciplines offered. Firstly, the studio environment offered an extreme counter-narrative to the transmission model (which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter), though this does not preclude transmission teaching in art and design necessarily. Many writers considered that student-centredness in an art and design environment was a given. However, this didn't appear to be necessarily the case, and even when this could perhaps be argued, there still was not agreement on what student-centred learning actually was and it was this detail that I was seeking.

First impressions also confirmed there were elements of all three perspectives being expressed to a greater or lesser extent when talking about student-centred learning, and these were able to be explored more visibly in art and design. Humanist pedagogies for example give value to affective aspects of learning, and it was clear that the studio environment could be an emotional learning space, and ideas around empowering students as learners perhaps more evident. It was thought too that perhaps academic staff gained more feedback from students in the studio environment, and so were more able to articulate some of the ideas around empowerment of students. The initial data collected from other disciplines supported some of these thoughts and indicated that the subtleties might be better explained by focusing on art and design.

As well as that, because many staff in art and design were themselves practitioners, links with the industry were more integrated than perhaps some other disciplines, and so ideas around professional identity and "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998, p xiii) could be more readily explored.

A final factor in this decision was curiosity. Art and design was an area of teaching that I knew the least about. I therefore decided to concentrate my study within art and design and sought research participants across three courses within art and design in the university.

The research questions

The substantive research question addressed in this thesis therefore is:

- What is the range of understanding of student-centred learning of academic staff supporting learning in art and design within the university of the researcher?

A sub-question to this, which may be addressed in response to the data but is not the primary objective is:

- What teaching methodologies are staff using that they consider are student-centred?

How the thesis will be presented

The thesis will be presented in eight chapters, and the scope of these will now be outlined. This introductory chapter will be followed by Chapter 2 dedicated to the literature review. Student-centred learning will be considered within a framework of three conceptions of learning, namely constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism as stated. Each conception will be outlined and critiqued; it will become clear that each has something different to offer when considering student-centred learning. Also integrated within this chapter will be discussion and critique of the applied pedagogic

literature, in particular that housed on the Higher Education Academy website, and this will be considered in relation to the political context presented in Chapter 1.

Some consideration has been given to the literature which focuses specifically on teaching in an art and design context where it is pertinent to the discussion of student-centred learning (e.g. Berghahn, n.d.; Brennan *et al.*, 2009; Davies, 1997; Houghton, 2007; Sagan, 2008). However this thesis does not address creativity as a construct, nor does it differentiate between research participants who might be teaching in courses ranging between fine art, craft skills, and design, or combinations of these. The discussion remains firmly on notions of student-centredness as viewed from the perspectives above. These perspectives I see as distinct from the discipline itself and could be examined whether the participants were teaching art, physics or philosophy. They are a step away from the discipline subject. However, creativity and other aspects of the discipline are not absent from the thesis. As might be expected, some research participants talk about creativity or craft when talking about their teaching. Creativity is also evident in some writers' conceptions of learning (e.g. Mezirow, 2009; Gage & Berliner, 1991), and so creativity does pervade the thesis to some extent.

Based on a subjectivist ontological and epistemological position, Chapter 3 will provide a rationale for the predominantly constructivist grounded approach that I have chosen to use for this thesis. Chapter 4 will then outline the ensuing process of data collection and analysis. Since the thesis is evidence of both the research and the research journey, both chapters will provide a personal narrative of the research as it progressed.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will all focus on presentation of the findings, with a chapter dedicated to constructivist, humanist and socio-cultural findings respectively. The thesis will conclude with a final chapter, Chapter 8, outlining conclusions, recommendations and reflections on the process.

Chapter 2

Literature review

Part 1: Seeking a definition for student-centred learning

Introduction to the literature review

The substantive research question as stated already is:

- What is the range of understanding of student-centred learning of academic staff supporting learning in art and design within the university of the researcher?

A sub-question to this which may be addressed in response to the data but is not the primary objective is:

- What teaching methodologies are staff using that they consider are student-centred?

The term student-centred learning is ubiquitous throughout the pedagogic literature (e.g. Trigwell *et al.*, 1994; Kember, 1997; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Akerlind, 2008) and appears in many university strategic documents including our own as mentioned in Chapter 1. In this chapter I wish to critically examine the literature and will do so by dividing this chapter into several sections. In the first, *Seeking a definition*, I will take a broad brush approach to the topic of student-centredness. In many ways, I will try to present the material as one might encounter it as a new academic staff member wishing to develop their understanding of learning

and teaching, and will draw on some of the professional literature mostly on the Higher Education Academy website, and discuss it with respect to some of the peer-reviewed largely phenomenographic studies. After giving the reader a taste of the complexities of seeking a definition, I will undertake to engage with student-centredness from three different perspectives of learning and so these will respectively form three subsequent sections of the literature review, namely *Constructivism, Humanism* and *Socio-cultural perspectives.*

Definitions of student-centred learning

A preliminary review of the professional literature (e.g. Davies, 1997;Houghton, 2007; Mills, 2000) revealed no substantive 'definition' or understanding of student-centred learning. One recurrent theme though was that student-centred learning is not is the transmission 'empty vessel' model, that is, that learners learn simply through *obtaining* information or knowledge, and this is supported by empirical studies (Kember, 1997). Transmission conceptions will be discussed in more detail later, but problematically it is worth noting here that the learning environment most associated with higher education is the lecture theatre. At the same time, as presented, student-centredness is a desired ethos within higher education, so it is worth investigating how student-centredness is accomplished.

First encounters with the literature are important as this mirrors new lecturers' engagement, so to introduce the literature review I will provide some examples of the disparate ideas around student-centred learning, and then try to bring some clarity to the discussion. The snapshot survey already discussed seemed to suggest no substantive definition of student-centred learning, and this seems to be also evident in the preliminary literature review. Sparrow *et al.* (2000) for example, in a conference

paper found student-centred learning associated with a range of ideas, including learning that is self-directed, learner-focused, autonomous, independent, collaborative, experiential, authentic, problem-based, and constructivist. As can be seen, this list indicates every manner of definition, from student-centredness as a teaching methodology (e.g. experiential, problem-based) to student-centredness as a conception of learning (e.g. constructivist), to student-centredness as learning environment perhaps (e.g. authenticity). It is this ambiguity that I wish to explore throughout this thesis.

Concept and conception

Before going further, I would like to explain my use of these terms. Entwistle and Peterson (2004) have differentiated between concept and conception in the following way. A concept is seen as something for which there is a shared understanding with commonly agreed principles. A conception (and how a concept is conceptualised) on the other hand, is an individual response to a concept, which might be markedly different from person to person. In using these terms, I am working with these principles in mind.

Ideas from the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres

My own review of the literature has revealed similar lack of clarity, and I would like to now introduce a range of interpretations and highlight the questions they raise. For example, a scan of the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres reveals that some writers write about student-centredness as students merely doing something themselves, for example Lucas (2009) included discussion of reading lists and the course timetable on Facebook as an example of student-centred interaction. Davies

(1997), from the Art, Design and Media Subject Centre considers that independent and student-centred learning is "synonymous with art and design practice" (p 1) but doesn't explicitly say what he thinks student-centred learning is, or to clarify what he means by independent. He contrasts it with "sitting with Nellie" (p 2), referring to the *atelier* method of early art schools where teachers passed on their expertise and cultural attitudes to students in an apprenticeship style environment. He implies that student-centred learning is about constructing learning experiences that reinforce a deep approach to learning (Biggs, 1998 cited in above); the notion of deep learning is embedded in constructivist conceptions of learning and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Davies also draws on Gibbs' (1991 cited in above) suggestions for developing a deep approach to "put students at the centre of their learning" (Davies, 1997, p 5), highlighting especially interaction with others as potentially useful. However, as will be discussed later, there are discrete interpretations of deep learning and it is unclear exactly where Davies aligns his interpretation.

Houghton (2007) also considers that student-centred learning is integral to an art and design environment, and implies that because teaching staff in art and design respond to differences in required knowledge and skills from student to student that "art education is emancipatory" (p 4, drawing on Danvers, 2003 cited in above), and implying that this is indicative of student-centredness.

Berghahn (n.d.), also from the Art, Design and Media Subject Centre, states workshops were student-centred "in so far as the students planned, organised, advertised and managed the events" (p 2). Mills (2000), who also had students organising their own seminars and then reflecting on the process stated this was student-centred because it

"conscientised [students] to the politics of the learning process itself" (p 1) by making them more aware of participation and power differentials, and empowerment.

A Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology (n.d.) resource on student-centred learning focuses on knowing your students: their aspirations and prior knowledge, and using this information to identify resource needs and design a provisional programme which is then discussed with students so they can have input into what is learnt, how and when; and what will be assessed and how.

Oosthuizen *et al.* in talking about student-centredness have cited Knowles (1993), Beyer (1995) and Wade (1995, all cited in Oosthuizen *et al.*, 2003) and focus on participation and responsibility to develop critical thinking skills, and see metacognition as fundamental to student-centred learning. Brennan *et al.* (2009), primarily citing O'Neill and McMahon (2005 cited in above) discuss student-centred learning as situated within a constructivist perspective and emphasise the shift in power differential to the student, active and independent learning, and prioritising the needs of students.

So, one would be forgiven for being confused, as some fairly disparate ideas have emerged already: is student-centredness merely doing? Or is it synonymous with deep learning? Is it connected with emancipation? Or organising (learning events)? Or reflecting on doing? Or about what is learnt from the reflection itself? Or maybe about the politics of the learning space itself? Or about involving students in learning outcomes and assessment processes? Or about the complexity of learning undertaken? Or tied to a particular theoretical concept? I hope through this thesis to

clarify and find the roots of these ideas, but will now make an initial response to some of these questions.

For example, is student-centredness merely *doing*? Is it the same as student-led (e.g. Lucas, 2009; Berghahn, n.d.)? A student *doing* something certainly is counter to receiving passively, the situation reflected in transmission models of learning which have been challenged for some time in the pedagogic literature. However, Kember and Wong (2000), in their study of Hong Kong students, have challenged some of the assumptions made about transmissive teaching. In their study, they looked for relationships between students' learning preferences (active or passive learning) and their perceptions of teachers (as transmissive or non-traditional in method). Though these relationships were not clear-cut, there was evidence that students in transmissive environments might begin by passively learning, but are seeking to understand, and so they value teachers who deliver material in a clear and logical way. Students also acknowledged that transmissive environments were necessary at times, and were just one element in a "multi-faceted" (p 86) approach to teaching.

However, students *doing* and student-led activity seem to be a starting point for thinking about student-centred learning by many as reflected above, but also suggested by the snapshot survey discussed in Chapter 1. Increasingly we are seeing evidence of more *doing* by students, as contact time with lecturers contracts, and students are encouraged to undertake their own research, or engage with each other on a discussion board for example. Certainly *doing* is seen as a central idea in constructivist conceptions of learning which will be discussed later in the chapter. However, *doing* in itself is not necessarily a rich learning experience, and I would suggest is not very convincing as a catch-all phrase for student-centred learning.

A second question that could be raised from the above is whether student-centred learning is synonymous with a deep approach to learning (Davies, 1997). Biggs (2003) describes a deep approach as:

> "when students feel this need to know, they automatically try to focus on underlying meaning, on main ideas, themes, principles or successful applications" (p 16).

However, the notion of deep learning itself is open to interpretation with discrete variations. Biggs' interpretation here and in earlier work (e.g. Biggs, 1999) focus on motivation and commitment. Biggs' fictional student Robert (Biggs, 1999) is only interested in putting in enough work to pass. Susan on the other hand, comes to university already with greater background knowledge, and is motivated to find answers and to reflect on the significance of learning opportunities. Biggs argues that using the notion of "constructive alignment" (1999, p 64) and encouraging more active engagement through higher level descriptors (e.g. analyse, theorise, hypothesise) engage the less motivated. Though citing Biggs, it is unclear that Davies' (1997) focus aligns with Biggs (1997, 2003).

Ramsden (2003), though including aspects of motivation, focuses even more on the learning process. For example, he contrasts surface learners who see a task as an imposition generated externally with deep learners who are motivated by active sense-making. Surface learners when approaching new material fail to see the whole, instead focusing on constituent parts which they tend to learn through memorisation. For Ramsden, deep learners are more likely to see their role as active sense-makers wanting to gain a person understanding of new material. They are seeking

connections, the overall messages conveyed by the writer, and more likely to relate this to their own experiences or prior knowledge.

As will unfold later in the chapter, deep approaches to learning, and perhaps especially Ramsden's (2003) focus are again associated with constructivism, and perhaps capture a key aspect of student-centred learning from a constructivist stance. However, the idea of "students at the centre of their learning" (Davies, 1997, p 5) appears to be a recurring mantra with little clarity. In Davies' context it appears to link closely with focusing on students' prior knowledge and understanding as a starting point for learning, again a constructivist idea which will be discussed later in the chapter. However, 'students at the centre' is implied in other contexts too. Quotes such as "all activities revolve around our key asset and customer" from the snapshot survey also indicate students are centrally located, but from a business perspective.

Another idea emanating from the above examples is the idea of student-centred learning being connected with emancipation (Houghton, 2007). Certainly some would argue that empowerment and emancipation are critical to student-centredness (e.g. Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Freire, 1974), and this will be discussed in more depth later when discussing humanist perspectives. However, the reference above, though perhaps capturing some aspects of a student-centred environment, does little to enlighten re student-centred learning *per se*.

The final idea I would like to highlight at this point is that of reflecting on doing (Mills, 2000) or perhaps what is meant is reflecting on the reflection. Certainly like the above, metacognitive activity is considered central to constructivist perspectives and will be

discussed later in the chapter. However, there are hints here that Mills sees student-centred learning as greater than the individual, and takes into consideration how individuals can be empowered within learning communities. Again there are links with Rogers and Freiberg (1994) and Freire's (1974) work, but there are also hints towards the dynamics of "communities of practice" (Wenger, 1998, p xiii) that will also be discussed later in the chapter.

What is apparent is that there is no universal understanding of student-centred learning from the literature cited thus far, and a newcomer to the literature might well be confused. In many cases origins of terminology discussed are seldom defined or referenced, and ideas are not necessarily underpinned by any firm theoretical understanding or framework. The discussion above gives an indication of the assumptions that are made by some writers, and perhaps some of the conflicting messages that underpin their ideas.

I would like to suggest that student-centred learning has perhaps become a malleable construct. Faced with competing and conflicting messages from government as outlined in Chapter 1 student-centred learning has become a conflict in itself. I would now like to consider the wider literature, again with a fairly broad brush approach to try to gain some sense of the major themes.

Origins of student-centred learning

The origin often cited (e.g. Cowan, 2006; Burnard, 1999; O'Neill & McMahon, 2005 who also cite Hayward, Dewey, Piaget, and Knowles) for student-centred learning is Rogers and in particular Rogers and Freiberg's *Freedom to learn* (1994) where they

suggest taking their client-centred approach to counselling into the education arena and criticise the expert driven, transmission model of teaching in favour of a "person-centered *(sic)*" (p 212) model. They talk about "whole-person learning" (p 36) which they see as learning which feels meaningful, that is experiential, that isn't necessarily just about learning content. They consider that prescribed curricula, didactic teaching, lack of choice in assignments, and teacher-led assessment are all detrimental to meaningful learning. Like their counselling model, they suggest moving the locus of control to the learner, and suggest the following to facilitate more effective learning:

- "realness or genuineness" of the facilitator, prepared to interact with students as a person, rather than adopting a role of an authority figure
- "prizing, acceptance, trust" where facilitators value learners, their opinions, and trust that they can make their own decisions about their learning
- "empathic understanding" where facilitators take time to understand how it feels to be a student from their point of view, without analysing or judging (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, pp 154-158).

Contemporaneous and subsequent empirical studies of teachers' conceptions have paralleled some of these ideas. Several studies around that time (e.g. Gow & Kember 1990; Gow & Kember, 1993; Prosser *et al.*, 1994; Trigwell *et al.*, 1994) also rejected transmission-oriented teaching in favour of learning-oriented conceptions, and have shown links between teachers' conceptions and the quality of students' intellectual engagement. Kember (1997) carried out a meta-analysis of ten such studies comparing their delineation of categories, and concludes that there is marked consistency across the studies of arranging conceptions on a continuum from teacher-centred, content-oriented conceptions to student-centred, learning-oriented conceptions, though their argument that there was a transitional category between

transmissive and facilitatory conceptions has been rejected in further empirical research by Samuelowicz and Bain (2001).

Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) conception would lie towards the student-centred, learning-oriented end of the spectrum, though there is less specificity with respect to higher education; their book is concerned primarily with schools. However, a similar language is evident: Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) focus, as with Trigwell *et al.* (1994) for example, lies more towards "intentions" (p 75) of teachers rather than their teaching methodologies, though this is less explicit than other writers. More explicit in Rogers and Freiberg (1994) is the notion of a holistic developmental process, which underpins much of their ideology, and this has been explicitly noted by Kember (1997) in his meta-analysis as a distinct facet of some interpretations of a student-centred, learning-oriented conception.

The second facet of a student-centred, learning-oriented conception identified by Kember (1997) focuses on students' intellectual development. Students are seen as active participators rather than passive receivers. Rogers and Freiberg (1994) similarly contrast learning environments as promoting learners to be either "citizens" or "tourists" (pp 8-9): responsible learners and active knowledge creators, or visiting consumers to the learning environment. Quoting Heidegger, they state:

> "The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than – learning" (Heidegger, 1968 cited in Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, p 34),

so Rogers and Freiberg (1994) talk of facilitation, of overturning the differential of power, and instead to trust, and to offer more choice to empower learners. Ultimately they talk of democracy:

"while students learn that freedom and responsibility are the glorious features of our democracy, they see themselves as powerless, with little freedom and almost no opportunity to exercise choice or carry responsibility" (p 211).

Overall the idea of active participators is evident in many of these studies (Kember, 1997). For example, Prosser *et al.*, note two teachers' conceptions they consider are student-centred: helping students develop conceptions, and helping students change conceptions. However, though there is a distinct difference between these and teachers' conceptions which focus on students acquiring teachers' own conceptions, there nevertheless seems to be in my view a gap between this and active knowledge creation (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Many times I have returned to Rogers and Freiberg (1994) whilst researching this project. Sometimes it appears fanciful and ideological, other times it seems to capture the real essence of what we are trying to achieve for learners in higher education, and for a civil society in general.

Moving from a transmission model

Many writers start describing student-centred learning by stating that what it is not is a transmission model of learning (e.g. Hirumi, 2002; Di Napoli, 2004; University of Bath, n.d.; Brandes & Ginnis, 1986) where information is passed from the expert teacher to the passive 'empty vessel' student, and then regurgitated for assessment, and this is supported by empirical studies of teachers' conceptions (Kember, 1997). These conceptions of learning see knowledge as commodified and packaged, and rest on an assumption often that learning is mimicry, and knowledge is unequivocal. Often

teacher-centred methodological approaches are contrasted with student-centred approaches in table format (e.g. Hirumi, 2002; University of Bath, n.d.). Barr and Tagg (1995) refer to moving from an "instruction paradigm" to a "learning paradigm" (p 1). Presenting student-centred learning as a changing lens of thinking about learning is common, however, this does not necessarily clarify what the learning paradigm entails.

Historically the changing perspective on learning has followed a changing perspective on knowledge from something that leans towards absolute and rests with the expert lecturer, towards a post-modern idea of knowledge being something that is individually interpreted and constructed to form one's own understanding depending on one's prior knowledge, experience, attitudes and values. Burnard, talking about Rogerian ideas (1983 cited in Burnard, 1999), states "knowledge itself [has become] a process of negotiation and debate" (p 244). This construction of meaning is the basis of constructivism which will be discussed in depth later, and which has been mentioned already by some writers when talking about student-centred learning.

Often linked to this move from transmission models are ideas of surface and deep learning. Giaramita (2001) equates transmission models with surface learning and dependency, a conception of surface learning similar to that of Ramsden (2003), and encourages student-centred learning so students will become more autonomous and develop deeper learning. Others who link student-centred learning with deep learning are Lea *et al.* (2003), Hockings (2009), and Gibbs and Lucas (1996), as well as Davies (1997) cited earlier. As suggested earlier, deep learning, though open to discrete variations, is associated with constructivist conceptions and will be discussed again.

Responding to students' needs

For some writers, student-centred learning is closely connected with students' needs. Mayes (2004) states:

> "what we imply by the term 'learner-centred': adjusting our teaching and learning activities in ways that take account of individual needs" (p 3)

so emphasises as a starting point not only the prior knowledge of students, but also

> "*why* a particular learner is at a particular point of knowledge or skill, or has a particular kind of ability, or a particular level of motivation" (p 3)

and argues for an individual pedagogy.

Others also see this focus on students' learning experience as a central element to student-centred learning, for example Moore (1999), who encourages more interaction and negotiation with students, and Hirumi (2002), who discusses respective entering skills of students as a basis for negotiating individual learning objectives to meet an outcome defined by the degree certification. Lea *et al.* (2003) perhaps took a step even further back and suggested moving:

> "from an 'inside out' approach, where those on the inside 'know' what is best, to an 'outside in' approach where customers' expectations are researched and serviced" (p 321).

So, even with those starting from students' needs, student-centred learning is problematic. Some interpret students' needs as primarily connecting with learning needs: connecting to prior knowledge, or understanding and adjusting for perhaps where students get stuck in the learning process. Some are talking about negotiation around the process to meet a pre-determined outcome. For others, the negotiation is

happening in the course design process, and some see responding to needs as an opportunity to develop one's scholarship of learning and teaching.

Student-centred learning within a constructivist paradigm

Many writers link student-centredness with constructivism (e.g. Hirumi, 2002; Lea *et al.*, 2003). Gilis *et al.* (2008) state that the increasing commitment to constructivism has been the impetus for a shift of focus to the student and thus to student-centred pedagogies.

Barr and Tagg (1995), as stated already, discuss moving from an instruction paradigm where universities provide instruction, to a learning paradigm where universities' purpose is to enable learning. Though not using the terms student-centred learning or constructivism, their ideas are clearly constructivist:

> "a college's purpose is not to transfer knowledge but to create environments and experiences that bring students to discover and construct knowledge for themselves" (p 3).

Bransford *et al.* (1999) when talking about student-centred learning emphasise the knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners bring to the learning: a commonly agreed principle of constructivist thought as will be discussed later, and also talk about presenting students with learning situations that are difficult enough to be challenging, but not too difficult so as to be discouraging, an idea reflected in von Glasersfeld's (1990) discussion of constructivism.

Control versus independence strategies

Gibbs and Lucas (1996) though not specifically referring to student-centredness, contrast "control strategies" (in which they include use of objectives, objective testing, automated feedback, learning packages, structured lectures, self-paced study and others) with "independence strategies" (p 45) (including learning contracts, problem-based learning, peer feedback, group work, student-led seminars). The purpose of the contrast in this paper was to point out that when contrasting two large cohort programmes which predominantly used one strategy or the other, the programme using predominantly independence strategies engaged students more deeply in their learning, and students gained better grades in doing so.

Developing student independence and responsibility are often at the heart of ideas of student-centredness (e.g. Ingleton *et al.*, 2000; Birch & Walet, 2008). Taylor (2000) has associated flexible learning (by which he means educational approaches which include technological tools) with student-centredness because of the increased "reliance on student self-management and independence" (p 107) that it offers. He goes on to liken student-centred learning with "educational empowerment" (p 109) and later, when discussing developing students to cope with e-learning environments, states that "explicitly addressing [their] needs" (p 113) is a necessary aspect of a student-centred approach to teaching.

Emancipation

Emancipation, by which I mean feelings of freedom and empowerment on the part of the student, is cited often as a feature of student-centred learning. It certainly forms the basis for Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) ideas as stated above. It is the ultimate

handover of power to the student, and feels qualitatively different to some degree to strategies to encourage independent learning. Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) ideas of valuing and trust say more about the relationship between learner and teacher, and strike at the heart of the power differential. Learning becomes much more a partnership, and these ideas are echoed in Gilis *et al.* (2008) for example, who in outlining professional attitudes of what they call student-centred teachers, step back from ideas such as allowing space in the curriculum for student choice, to the core positioning of the teacher as one who trusts students will take that responsibility.

Cowan draws on Rogers (1983 cited in Cowan, 2006) when he used the term student-centred learning to describe an innovation he made to a teaching programme in which students were given responsibility for determining their own learning outcomes, their own method for achieving these, setting their own pace, and undertaking the assessment themselves (through self-evaluation and peer feedback) to determine if they had achieved the learning outcomes. This appears to fit very well with Rogers' intentions, and again, highlights a trust relationship between teacher and students.

Burnard (1999), also talking about Rogers says:

> "it was Rogers' contention that education should involve students in being actively involved in choosing almost *all* aspects of the educational process. To this end, students might not only choose *what* to study but *how* and *why* that topic might be a useful and interesting one to study" (p 244).

There seems to me to be a qualitative shift between encouraging students to be independent learners through for example peer learning and group work to a position of being what Ingleton *et al.* (2000) call "questioners" who are "searching for knowledge"

(p 4). Some raise questions about independence itself, e.g. Lea *et al.* (2003) talk about "interdependence" (p 322) between the student and teacher, rather than independence, highlighting the mutual input each have in the learning relationship. Others, e.g. Maclellan (2008) focus on motivation as a key construct when thinking about developing student-centred learning.

Questions arising

Despite the persuasive rhetoric about student-centred learning across higher education, it appears there is not a common understanding of student-centred learning. The above review raises the following questions:

- Is student-centred learning associated with particular teaching methodologies?
- Is student-centred learning about responding to students' needs, whatever they are, and that these then drive the teaching methodology adopted?
- Is it about responsibility and independence (or interdependence and partnership?), or about motivation?
- Or is it an underlying principle or ethos, like empowerment, or democracy?
- Or is it associated with a particular conception of learning such as constructivism, or a particular epistemological position?

Though some of the key themes discussed above overlap, there doesn't appear to be a central idea, principle or ethos that starts one's thinking about student-centred learning. In my view, this appears to be at the core of the widely varied interpretations of student-centred learning. The ideas above also reflect different responsibilities of the respective parties, i.e. students and teachers, which again would be clearer within a central anchor point. At the same time, there are in the literature various perspectives on learning itself, from constructivism to situated perspectives, and I believe it is useful

for teachers, if they are going to engage in developing their practice, to consider to what extent each perspective is appropriate and relevant to them as a teacher, and to the discipline and/or teaching environment within which they teach. In this thesis therefore, I am going to focus on trying to bridge some of the ideas suggested above with three perspectives of learning itself: constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism. I will therefore consider each of these perspectives in the literature review.

Part 2: Constructivism

Introduction to constructivism

As stated in the first section of this literature review, student-centred learning and constructivism are often linked, and so I wish, in this section, to explore constructivism more fully, and to see if it satisfactorily provides a framework for thinking about student-centred learning.

The dominant view of learning in the pedagogic literature is that learning is a process of knowledge construction; learning happens in the head of the learner (e.g. Cobb, 1999; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This clearly contrasts sharply with the commodified knowledge of the transmission model, but even so Piagetian interpretations of constructivism vary significantly from those derived from Vygotsky, and Vygotskian academics themselves have taken divergent pathways of interpretation.

Most interpretations of constructivism have the following common elements:

- Learning is active

The idea of the active learner is present in most descriptions of constructivism, that "knowledge and understanding [are] actively acquired" (Perkins, 1999, p 7), whether this is by oneself through thinking, working through problems and reflecting, or whether it is with others (e.g. Perkins, 1999; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

- Recognition of prior knowledge
- A process of weighing new knowledge against old

There is also the underlying principle that this activity involves considering new knowledge in relation to existing understanding of the subject, or weighing up "viability" (von Glasersfeld, 1999 cited in Poerksen, 2004, p 383), and involves modifying, accommodating, or perhaps discarding and replacing old understandings. Constructivism gives weight to prior knowledge, and acknowledges that if the learner doesn't have relevant prior knowledge, learning may be difficult. This perhaps has added significance with the broadening of access to higher education from a range of educational backgrounds as discussed in Chapter 1.

- Ownership or idiosyncrasy

There is also the notion that this construction is "idiosyncratic" (Richardson, 2003, p 1625), that learners each have their own unique interpretation which is dependent on prior knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. Through engagement and agreement with others, interpretation becomes a shared understanding and is given credibility through being shared; it becomes "formal knowledge" (Richardson, 2003, p 1625).

Constructivism itself is sometimes misrepresented (Hattie, 2009) or has multiple meanings (Perkins, 1999). Hattie (2009) points out that constructivism is not a theory of teaching but a form of knowing, and he claims it is specifically distinct from but bringing together surface knowledge of the physical world (the facts and figures) and deeper knowledge and associated thinking skills. He therefore makes a distinction between what he calls "three worlds of achievement" (p 26), the third of these entirely constructed by humankind, and points out that all three need to be considered in the teaching process, a distinction made less clear by others.

Constructivism and the nature of truth

The notion of idiosyncrasy has implications about the nature of knowledge, it can no longer be equated with "objective truth" (McCormick & Paechter, 1999, p xii). This notion fits with post-modernist ideas discussed earlier in this chapter: that there are multiple meanings of reality depending on the standpoint (Burnard, 1999). Burnard, in describing post-modernism cites the writer Lyotard who makes the point that it is the "reader who writes the text" (Lyotard, 1983 cited in Burnard, 1999, p 243), and this to a large extent, describes the basis of constructivism. Roth, talking about radical constructivists describes their position as:

> "we live forever in our own, self-constructed worlds: the world cannot ever be described apart from our frames of experience" (Roth, 1999, p 7).

However, as stated above, though understanding is created within the individual's head, sharing ideas through interaction can result in a more or less shared understanding, more of which will be discussed later.

Piagetian and Vygotskian perspectives: differentiating between individual and social constructivism

McInerney highlights the central idea of Piagetian thinking, that:

> "learners construct their own schema through personal interaction with the world of experience" (McInerney, 2005, p 590).

This gave rise to the individual (or cognitive) constructivist movement which underpins some of the contemporary literature, and which I have begun to describe above, for example von Glasersfeld (1990). Prosser and Trigwell (1999) in summarising von Glasersfeld state:

"knowledge is constructed internally, and tested through interaction with the outside world" (p 13).

Where Piagetian and Vygotskian interpretations differ is that Piagetian interpretations start and end with the individual (Rogoff, 1999). Both Piaget and Vygotsky valued interaction with others as an important aspect of learning, but for Piaget, this is solely instrumental in assisting the individual to independently judge new material against previous knowledge, and then to discard or reshape old understandings in light of this knowledge, or in fact disregard the new where it appears incompatible (Rogoff, 1999). It is this 'stuckness' that cognitive constructivists such as von Glasersfeld see as the impetus for learning (Martin, 2006) and will be discussed later. However, though Piaget acknowledges the usefulness of learning with others, he gives no value to culture or history in shaping learners (Rogoff, 1999). Instead, learning and interpretation is as noted above, dependent on prior knowledge and is a process of "building and testing hypotheses" (Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC), 2004, p 13).

Having considered the Piagetian interpretations of constructivism, I now wish to turn to those influenced by Vygotsky. Vygotsky's conceptual frame is sharply contrasted to Piaget in that the individual is not seen separate or contrasted with society, but integrated in a mutually enhancing way. For Vygotsky, learning is seen as a process of co-construction, with the individual and the social environment inextricably linked (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Rogoff, 1999).

This has given rise to two further strands of thinking which in this thesis I have called the social constructivist movement and the more radical socio-cultural perspectives of learning (e.g. Rogoff, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1999a, b; Matusov, 2008). There will be

further discussion of socio-cultural perspectives later in the chapter and in particular, Vygotsky's idea of the "zone of proximal development" (Rogoff, 1999, p 73), but for the purposes of discussion here, the principal difference often cited between social constructivism and socio-cultural perspectives (e.g. Richardson, 2003, though her terminology is different) is that though social constructivists acknowledge the power of interaction with others in the learning process, they see the 'construction' as largely an individualised activity (and this is how I have defined it here). Socio-cultural theorists on the other hand, see what is happening in the head of the learner and that happening in their learning environment as interdependent, inseparable and constantly in a state of flux. Having decided to use the three respective perspectives of constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism to discuss student-centred learning in this thesis these differences need to be drawn out to enable detailed discussion later.

Trying to unravel the differences however is complex, because different writers use different terminology, which I have summarised in Table 1. For example, Prosser and Trigwell (1999) describe four learning perspectives: cognitivist or information processing, individual constructivist, Vygotskian social constructivist, and constitutionalist, the first three they describe as dualistic (i.e. student separate from the world) and the latter as non-dualistic. JISC (2004) describe four perspectives too: associative (though this does not correlate with Prosser and Trigwell's cognitivist), individual constructivist, social constructivist, and social perspectives (the latter of which appears to align with Prosser and Trigwell's constitutionalist perspective). Roth (1999) contrasts radical constructivism (which aligns with individual constructivist in above references cited), and social constructivism (his description more aligned with social perspectives than social constructivist of Prosser and Trigwell, and JISC), and Richardson (2003), though using different language makes the same distinction. As stated, I will use the terms individual or cognitive constructivism, and social

constructivism for dualist (with respect to self and society) interpretations; and socio-culturalism (or situated learning) for interpretations that are non-dualist as noted in Table 1.

The language I have adopted for this study	Individual or cognitive constructivism	Social constructivism	Socio-cultural or situated
Relationship of individual to society	Dualist	Dualist	Non-dualist
Prosser & Trigwell (1999)	Individual constructivist	Vygotskian social constructivist	Constitutionalist
JISC (2004)	Individual constructivist	Social constructivist	Social perspectives
Roth (1999)	Radical constructivism		Social constructivism
Richardson (2003)	Psychological constructivism		Social constructionism or social constructivism

Table 1: The relationship of the language I have adopted in this study in comparison with language used in other studies; and differentiation with respect to individual and society.

Application of individual constructivism to the educational setting

As stated earlier, what underpins constructivism is the fundamental idea that knowledge is socially constructed and relational, rather than right or wrong (Perry, 1970 cited in Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). Constructivism moves the focus to the student, and how students are constructing their own understanding. The lecturer, mindful of this, might still use transmission methods like lectures or direct skills training, but incorporates a way of thinking that is removed from the expert teacher.

As stated earlier, the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) (2004) suggests that constructivism implies students "building and testing hypotheses" (p 13) and suggest the following approaches:

- "interactive environments for knowledge building
- activities that encourage experimentation and discovery of principles
- support for reflection and evaluation" (p 13).

These are not uncommonly held views of how constructivism can be applied to the teaching environment, and are echoed in other writing (e.g. Richardson, 2003; Biggs, 2003). They rest on the premise outlined at the beginning of the chapter that students' prior knowledge will be considered in learning design and activated in the learning process. They also imply what Biggs (2003) calls a deep approach, where students are focused and motivated either intrinsically or extrinsically to gain understanding. As well as that, they acknowledge the 'viability' aspect of constructing understanding, and thus opportunities for students to test ideas and add to or challenge existing understanding are critical.

For many constructivists (e.g. von Glasersfeld, 1990; Poerksen, 2004; Martin, 2006), creating dissonance is an important factor in stimulating learning. In a conversation transcribed in Poerksen, von Glasersfeld, reflecting on Piaget's work, talks about "accommodation" (Poerksen, 2004, p 395) where when faced with a mismatch between new material and what is known already, students face a real opportunity for learning as they negotiate this dissonant position. The teacher needs to create an environment where this dissonance can take place, and provide a productive learning opportunity (Martin, 2006), and this can be augmented by opportunities to reflect, both on the subject itself, but also on the learning process.

However dissonance when too great can be a disincentive to understanding, and perhaps is what Mayes (2004) is referring to when he talks about responding to students' needs discussed earlier in the chapter. Meyer and Land have also focused on this dissonance to identify particularly "troublesome knowledge" (Meyer & Land, 2006, p 4) which poses considerable challenges to prior understanding, but once understood, changes one's ontological perspective. This idea will be returned to later in the thesis.

Social constructivism in practice

I now wish to consider social constructivism in practice to highlight aspects that will be drawn upon later in the thesis. JISC's (2004) interpretation of social constructivism is that learners need to "actively construct new ideas through collaborative activities and/or through dialogue" (p 13) and suggest the following approaches to developing a social constructivist learning environment:

- "interactive environments for knowledge building
- Activist that encourage collaboration and shared expression of ideas
- Support for reflection, peer review and evaluation" (JISC, 2004, p 13),

so the individualistic nature of this approach is represented but happening within a social environment. Again, these ideas are represented similarly in other texts (e.g. Richardson, 2003); the essential difference as stated between individual and social constructivism focuses on the perhaps amplifying nature of interaction, of developing a shared knowledge, and knowledge creation (Richardson, 2003).

Constructivism and student-centred learning

It is apparent that there is some similarity between the language associated with constructivism and that associated with writings on student-centred learning. Ideas around purposeful active engagement, discovery learning, creating one's own understanding, building on prior knowledge, reflection, and creating dissonance all feature. The parallels are especially drawn with the notion of deep learning, which has perhaps become part of the lexicon because of its contrast with 'shallow' which is largely associated with transmission modes, and because it perhaps seems more descriptive and therefore easier to grasp. Overall though, it is perhaps no surprise then that constructivism and student-centred learning are often linked in the literature. However there are several ideas such as empowerment and emancipation that were suggested in the introductory section of this chapter as connected in some way to student-centred learning; these have not featured in constructivist conceptions and will be addressed later in the chapter.

There is also no real connection with ideas prevalent in the current social policy in Wales as discussed in Chapter 1. For example, constructivism doesn't explicitly address students' relationship with their environment for example, and thus ideas around employability are not specifically addressed. As stated, it also does not address how students are empowered through learning, and thus social justice is not explicitly acknowledged or attended to.

Synopsis of constructivism

To close this section of the literature review, I would like to summarise the general points made about constructivism which I have presented below in Table 2. Learning

is seen as a process of knowledge construction, an active engagement of the learner with the topic in question through thinking through the subject, working through ideas, reflecting and continually modifying one's understanding. Learning may be seen as an individual pursuit or done in collaboration with others, but essentially the construction that takes place remains with the individual. Social constructivists however place greater emphasis on the synergistic benefits of learning with others.

Characteristics	**Need opportunities for students to**
Active engagement (Perkins, 1999; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006)	Recognise and build on prior knowledge through experimentation and purposeful thinking (JISC, 2004; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Baviskar *et al.*, 2009)
Constructing new understanding by weighing up viability of new against old (von Glasersfeld, 1999 cited in Poerksen, 2004; Richardson, 2003)	Reflect and evaluate (alone through internal dialogue, or with others through interaction) (JISC, 2004; Richardson, 2003; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Baviskar *et al.*, 2009)
Idiosyncrasy of understanding => formal knowledge, and in social situations, to knowledge creation (Richardson, 2003)	Self-regulate through metacognition (Richardson, 2003; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Greeno *et al.*, 1999)
Dissonance often impetus for learning (von Glasersfeld, 1990; Poerksen, 2004; Martin, 2006; Baviskar *et al.*, 2009)	

Table 2: Synopsis of constructivist ideas about learning that feature often in descriptions of student-centred learning.

I now wish to consider student-centred learning through a second lens, the humanist perspective.

Part 3: Humanism

Introduction to this section

I have suggested at the close of the last section that though student-centred learning does appear to align reasonably with constructivist conceptions of learning, there do appear to be some ideas such as empowerment and emancipation that have not featured. I now wish to consider humanist ideas about learning to see if they provide any further insight into student-centred learning as a construct.

Humanism as a theoretical perspective

Humanists are generally concerned with the "freedom, dignity and potential of humans" (Brockett, 1997, p 2). Their focus is holistic (Huitt, 2009) and so humanist pedagogies involve both emotional and cognitive elements. In connecting the affective with the cognitive, learning is seen as akin to personal growth, and these ideas have been influenced by two theorists in particular: Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1989; also with Freiberg, 1994). In Maslow's seminal work (1970) he devised an ascending *hierarchy of needs* which ranged from physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, to esteem, and finally self-actualisation, where needs at the lower levels have to be met before one can tackle the higher level needs. Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) idea of client-centredness also encapsulates the idea of the self-actualised person: that people will tend towards self-actualisation and fulfilment of their potential when exposed to relationships that are genuine, empathic, and unconditionally accepting and trusting, as they describe the ideal counselling relationship to be (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Brockett, 1997). These central tenets of personal growth, consciousness raising, and empowerment are reflected in others' work too, for example, Freire (e.g. 1974) and

Mezirow (1990a, 1990b, 2009) and will be discussed shortly. Also commonly and explicitly addressed in humanist pedagogies are ideas of civic responsibility, democracy and social justice (e.g. Freire, 1974; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Mezirow, 2000; Rogers, 1961 cited in Blackie *et al.*, 2010). Many of these tenets of humanist pedagogies have been mentioned already with respect to student-centred learning and will be considered in more detail.

How do humanist perspectives compare with constructivist perspectives?

Discussions of constructivist environments often do not directly consider affective issues, nor are ideas around empowerment or self-actualisation discussed, and it has been suggested that these are indicated in a student-centred environment. For example, Baviskar *et al.*'s (2009) four tenets of a constructivist environment: eliciting prior knowledge, creating cognitive dissonance, application of knowledge with feedback, and reflection on learning (pp 543-544) pay little heed to these ideas. Others pay some attention to learners' emotional engagement, but more often as a consequence of a constructivist approach, rather than an integral part of it. For example, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) draw correlations between the self-regulating student and self-esteem, but in the activity of teaching, it is developing self-regulatory skills that is emphasised. They maintain (drawing on research by Dweck, 1999, and Black & Wiliam, 1998 both cited in above) that direct attention to learners' self-esteem is actually detrimental. Sagan (2008) too states:

> "emotions are still regarded somewhat as 'baggage' and split off from the rationalist, cognitive task of learning" (p 175),

and Blackie *et al.* (2010, citing Ramsden, 1992) state any empathy or compassion for students is often not apparent.

For many theorists however, the affective domain is a critical part of the conception of learning, and it is evident from the data collected for this project and discussed later that even where students' self-belief for example is not addressed directly, cognisance of a much more holistic approach is considered to be vital in developing student-centred learning in the environment of the research participants. Purely cognitive conceptions also fail to capture ideas of empowerment, and of broader civic issues such as democracy and social justice, and yet these ideas have been suggested in Chapter 1 as political drivers for change in higher education, and referred to often in conjunction with student-centred learning (e.g. WAG, 2009).

Discussion of the humanist literature

Rogers and Freiberg (1994), long advocates of student-centred learning, in reference to self-actualisation talk about "the fully functioning person" (p 313); to them (they have drawn from the counselling environment, but are attempting to apply to education) this represents an acknowledgment and connectedness to learners' feelings, and an emergence and blossoming of self-driven potential from that process:

> "the self and personality would emerge from experience rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit a preconceived self-structure" (p 318),

and this personal growth is more intuitive, more self-trusting, and, the idea most pertinent to an education setting, builds a capacity to learn how to learn and therefore self-enhancing. For them, this does not mean conforming or adjusting to the local environment or culture but feeling confident to be oneself and to treat one's own feelings with integrity, even where they may be in conflict with others (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994). This personal growth is seen as more important than the content of

the learning itself (Blackie *et al.*, 2010). There is an underlying emphasis on self-belief. This latter point is one I wish to return to when discussing socio-cultural perspectives of learning later in the chapter.

Freire's (1974) ideas of critical consciousness or "conscientização" (p 37) (now often called critical pedagogy, e.g. Mezirow, 2009) stemmed from his concern about the disenfranchisement of a significant proportion of the Brazilian population because of illiteracy. Illiteracy led to what he called an "adaptive" (p 4) response to societal pressures, rather than a sense of empowerment and a capacity to make conscious choices and influence change. Freire used the term "massification" (p 16), a term largely misused by subsequent writers (e.g. Fitzmaurice, 2010), to describe this idea where a large proportion of society is "manipulated by the elite into an unthinking, manageable agglomeration" (p 16). Again the main emphasis or vehicle for learning he emphasised was the building of self-belief and self-confidence leading to subsequent feelings of personal empowerment, and to active participation in change.

At the same time, Freire (1974), whilst encouraging a more conscious personal position, cautions towards tolerance as a central tenet: to be both tolerant of others' differing viewpoints whilst expecting the liberty of expressing one's own view. This he sees as both enfranchising, but also, because he has taken a somewhat more political stance, to reduce the risk of sectarianism. Incidentally, these ideas of tolerance and freedom of expression are echoed by Grayling (2009), a prominent public figure in the British Humanist Association, in which he discusses what he considers the reactionary nature of the British government in response to the threat of terrorism. So whilst Freire's (1974) pedagogy empowers, it is steered towards 'goodness' (as Freire sees it). Perhaps in contrast, Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) pedagogy accepts clients'

forward-moving decisions unequivocally. As Burnard (1999) points out, there is however a sense of optimism, trust and morality within their writing that suggests that they believe clients/learners will always move towards goodness.

Mezirow (1990a, 1990b, 2009) has drawn on Freire and encapsulates similar ideas of consciousness raising and personal development in his writing on transformational learning, which he describes as enabling learners:

> "to recognize and reassess the structure of assumptions and expectations which frame our thinking, feeling and acting" (Mezirow, 2009, p 90).

Whilst he still essentially describes a constructivist process of reshaping prior understandings through reflective practice, he sees the self as integral to learning or as Blackie *et al.*, state: "being cannot be considered apart from knowing" (p 640). Mezirow places greater emphasis on critically examining one's own prior understandings and the social and cultural "frame of reference" (Mezirow, 2009, p 92) which formed that understanding. He also emphasises acknowledgment of others' frame of reference, and so puts considerable emphasis on dialogue to transform our frames of reference:

> "to make [our mindsets] more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2009, p 92).

Though criticised for ignoring the affective domain (Clark & Wilson, 1991 and others cited in Baumgartner, 2001), his focus on empowerment and personal growth leaves little doubt that his ideas are holistic.

This critical approach is not dissimilar to Freire. Central to Freire's (1974) ideas of emancipatory education is to combine both learning content with learning process: to

heighten participants' awareness of their social and political position as they learn to read rather than to teach reading in a mechanistic transmission model. Through the process of developing participants' concept of culture and the role they play in developing culture, participants are empowered to take control of their own learning, the tools of which (reading in this case) are being presented alongside the ongoing self-awareness built through continuing discussions of culture. At the same time, participants are empowered to activate change. The role of the teacher in this model is to provide a point for dialogue and critique using pictures, to be empathic to participants' views and to use this as a starting point for introducing the tools of reading.

Application of humanist ideas to the educational setting

So having looked at these theorists in detail, how does this examination of a holistic approach focused on empowerment enhance our understanding of student-centred learning? Across the humanist literature, there appear to be some reasonably consistent ideas that need to be applied to an educational setting to enable movement towards student self-actualisation:

- That an underlying principle is that education should provide opportunities for empowerment (e.g. Freire, 1974; Mezirow, 2009; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994)

- That choice for students in what they do and how they do it (and subsequent responsibilities of that choice) is a necessary component of a humanist educational environment (though this is generally expressed within the confines of the local situation, e.g. societal demands, a programme of study etc) (e.g. Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Cowan, 2006; Freire, 1974). It needs to be noted here that Freire is not without his critics in this respect, for example Burbules

and Burk (1999 cited in Mezirow, 2009) consider his idea of critical pedagogy to be unreflective and indoctrinating

- An underlying faith that students have the potential to make appropriate (to them) choices and maximise their potential (e.g. Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Freire, 1974; Mezirow, 2009; Brockett, 1997)

- That students are learning in an environment with little power differential, and where unconditional positive regard and attendance to feelings is central (e.g. Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Gage & Berliner, 1991)

- That emphasis is on the process of learning and developing metacognition rather than the product (e.g. Mezirow, 1990a, 2009; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Freire, 1974; Gage & Berliner, 1991)

- That creativity of approach is encouraged (e.g. Mezirow, 2009; Gage & Berliner, 1991)

- That episodes of learning are part of a lifelong process and they are individual to the learner (e.g. Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Mezirow, 2009)

- That students' judgment of their own progress is the more important (e.g. Cowan, 2006; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Gage & Berliner, 1991).

Many of these ideas will be discussed with respect to research participants' views on student-centred learning later in the findings chapters. Essentially though they emphasise student-centred learning as an individualised approach facilitated by a positive trusting relationship with teaching staff, and which fosters empowerment.

Student-centred learning and humanist pedagogies

I wish to now consider how closely aligned ideas of student-centred learning are with humanist pedagogies. As illustrated, humanism is essentially a constructivist pedagogy with an added affective element leading to learner empowerment, which essentially humanists consider is absent or at least less emphasised in other pedagogies. As stated earlier, student-centred learning is often attributed to Rogers, and especially to his book *Freedom to learn* (1994 with Freiberg), which applied Rogers' client-centred counselling to the educational arena. Central to Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) ideas is this core of personal empowerment, but also of becoming "stakeholders in their learning communities" (p 8) and this idea is echoed by Freire (1974) especially. These ideas are not expressed explicitly in constructivist conceptions, and yet they are often stated with respect to student-centred learning.

I would like to make a tentative conclusion at this point that humanism appears to offer a more robust and all-encompassing lens through which to view student-centred learning than constructivism.

Synopsis of humanism

To conclude this section, I would like to summarise humanist ideas, and provide a comparative positioning of where student-centred learning fits with respect to humanist and constructivist conceptions (Table 3 below). To summarise the key points of humanism, humanists see learning as both a cognitive and affective activity. Humanist pedagogies essentially are constructivist, but pay more critical attention to the emotional aspects of learning, and so ideas of personal growth, self-actualisation, empowerment and democracy feature. Interaction, as with social constructivism, is

more prominent than in cognitive constructivist conceptions; however the interaction perhaps serves a fuller purpose than that in social constructivism. This will be discussed further later in the chapter. Discussions of student-centred learning in the literature often draw on humanist pedagogies, in particular ideas around confidence raising and empowerment.

	Constructivism	***Humanism***
Emphasis on	Cognitive	*Sense of self*
Ideas that exemplify	Self-regulation Metacognition Active engagement (e.g. Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006)	*Ownership* *Confidence* *Self-belief* *(e.g. Rogers & Freiberg, 1994)*
Characterised by	Internal dialogue	*Empowerment (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994)* *Consciousness- raising* *(Mezirow, 1999)*

Table 3: Humanist perspective on learning in comparison to constructivism, emphasising characteristics pertinent to student-centred learning.

However, there is another lens, socio-culturalism, that I would like to now consider. There are hints that the socio-cultural lens may offer further insight into student-centred learning, especially with respect to one's relationship with the learning environment itself.

Part 4: Socio-cultural perspectives

Introduction to socio-culturalism as a frame of reference

In the last section, though acknowledging the strength of humanist conceptions in providing a framework for student-centred learning, I suggested that socio-culturalism might offer yet another valuable perspective, especially with respect to learners' relationship with their environment. To do so I will return to Vygotsky whose influence on constructivism was discussed earlier in this chapter. In this section though I wish to consider the perhaps more radical ideas of socio-culturalism, which probably more accurately convey Vygotsky's intention (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), and which will offer another distinct perspective on student-centred learning as well as further insight into social constructivism.

The dichotomous versus the dialectic

Fundamental to Vygotskian thought is the notion that human development originates from the social environment; it cannot be conceived without the social, cultural and historical milieu that surrounds it. As stated earlier in the chapter, two schools of thought, social constructivism and socio-culturalism have emerged from Vygotsky's ideas which probably represent the degree to which researchers accept Vygotskyism or remain fundamentally tied to Piaget's individualistic frame. These two schools are often indecipherable in the literature because they are often conflated. Where they are disaggregated, writers tend to emphasise the distinction between the dichotomous and the dialectic, i.e. social constructivism acknowledges the usefulness of interaction with others in the learning process, but still sees the 'construction' as an individualised activity, and thus there remains a dichotomy between the external (the social

interaction) and the internal (the individual mind) (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

Socio-cultural theorists in contrast, see the internal and the external as interdependent, knowledge as being co-constructed through a constantly evolving dialectic, and that the individual and the social practice cannot be viewed separately (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). For socio-cultural theorists, personhood does not pre-date culture; self is 'made' and shaped by history and culture; it is socially constructed (Martin, 2006). So, knowledge and what makes us ourselves are cultural products. This will be discussed further later.

Socio-culturalism in action

Two key themes have emerged from the work of Vygotsky: human action, and mediation, and these are common across all social learning perspectives, i.e. that human development is a function of interaction with social environments, and that this interaction is mediated by tools, including physical and linguistic tools, which form a conduit (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Engeström, 2001). Words and objects carry with them particular cultural meanings that are perpetuated through communities and generations, for example a wedding ring in western culture (Daniels, 2011), or language such as whether the country to the east of Australia is called New Zealand or *Aotearoa*. In the higher education environment, these tools would include the teaching space, access to labs, equipment, technology including virtual learning environments and how they are used and the particular cultures inherent within them. Tools also include the discourse of the discipline and many others. These all form part of the socio-cultural environment that is the university, and on arrival students and indeed staff have to find a way to negotiate it and its norms. This is relevant to this thesis because student-centred learning is sometimes cited as a way of enabling learners,

perhaps unaccustomed through limited cultural capital to negotiating this type of environment, to succeed.

The interactive nature of learning is exemplified in Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (Rogoff, 1999, p 73) where the learner working with someone more expert is able to gain a greater understanding than what s/he might do alone. It is also evident in the work of Lave and Wenger (1999a) where the learner is acting initially on the periphery, increasing participation and taking increasing responsibility over time. The learner moves from newcomer to old timer as s/he becomes enculturated into the "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998, p xiii). To consider this in higher education terms, Lave and Wenger (1999a) point out that this is not just about learning being *located* in a particular community of practice, but about the generative nature of the social practice itself that enables the learning to take place. To this end, university staff need to consider the authenticity of the community within which students are learning. Again this is relevant to this thesis, because if student-centred learning is in any way indicated as connected with the wider world of work and/or society, then authenticity of the learning environment becomes critical.

At the same time, the learner, in participating in the community of practice, is changing the community, which itself is a dynamic entity (Lave & Wenger, 1999a; Martin, 2006; Cowan, 2006). The 'zone' is the difference between what the learner might be able to achieve alone, and what they can achieve with another, and within this space is the social and cultural milieu in which the learner and teachers are engaging, including tools such as language and technology (Roth, 1999), and historical contexts such as the predominant interpretations of the discipline at that time. The distinction between learner and knowledgable teacher has since been expanded to include the less distinct

differential that can occur in collaborative peer groups working together, where in negotiating the division of tasks, individuals bring and/or develop their own expertise which they can then use to develop the skills of others within the group (Roth, 1999). Learning becomes a dynamic iterative process of the learner influencing others (including peers and teachers), and others influencing the learner, and building towards a negotiated and concordant understanding, which itself continues to remain in a state of flux. For social learning theorists, this concordance remains situated; ideas of re-shaping individuals' understanding are at least underplayed if not rejected entirely. Perhaps in common with social constructivist views but much more apparent here in the socio-cultural perspective, learning involves negotiation in a space between the student and the environment. So the 'zone' is a key feature in both social constructivist and socio-cultural perspectives; it amplifies the nature of interaction as an essential vehicle for learning.

Key themes of socio-culturalism

It is apparent then that learning, from a socio-cultural perspective, is deeply embedded in the community within which the learning is taking place, and unlike cognitive constructivism and most conceptions of social constructivism, it acknowledges and encompasses a broad dialogue that stretches not only across the immediate community, but across history and cultural mores themselves.

It is also perhaps apparent that power can play a more significant (or at least recognised) part in determining how, when and to what degree learning will take place, because socio-cultural perspectives place greater emphasis on *access* to learning, an idea perhaps relevant to this thesis because of the changing student cohort as outlined in Chapter 1. Because of the notion of engaging first as a peripheral member, with

gradual enculturation over time, a socio-cultural lens can capture for example, barriers purposefully placed by others to restrict access. A socio-cultural lens might also capture one's own cultural obstacles in negotiating entry to a particular community. Learning can be quite political from a socio-cultural perspective.

Identity also is a key element of conceptions of learning from a socio-cultural perspective, and I will discuss this shortly. First, I would like to introduce the metaphors of acquisition and participation as described by Sfard (1998) to throw further light on the comparison between the three conceptions discussed so far.

Acquisition and participation

Sfard (1998) compares the metaphors of acquisition and participation in an attempt to provide some insight into modes of learning. Within acquisition modes, alongside commodified ideas of learning implicit in transmission models, she includes constructivism. Despite acceptance within constructivism that learners are constructing their own sense of the subject, rather than acquiring knowledge unchanged from the teacher-expert, she thinks this constructing still has ideas about the head being a container, and the learner having ownership of the constructed ideas. She contrasts this with participation conceptions exemplified by socio-cultural views of learning, where ideas of 'knowledge' as a commodity is replaced by "knowing" (p 6) emphasising a more dynamic, ongoing engagement with the community as described above, and:

> "[making] salient the dialectic nature of the learning interaction: the whole and the parts affect and inform each other ... the very existence of the whole is fully dependent on the parts" (Sfard, 1998, p 6).

Sfard does not directly address humanism, though I have included her ideas and my interpretation as a comparator in the table below (Table 4). Using Sfard's metaphors, despite the significance of interaction in both social constructivist and humanist conceptions, I think they are both largely acquisitional.

Identity: being and becoming across the three perspectives

Identity has not been discussed thus far in this thesis, and I wish to do so now. Each of the three perspectives has implications for ideas about identity, and the spatial positioning of learners as they become more adept.

Constructivism as stated, focuses on the cognitive. Ideas of self-regulation, metacognition and active engagement with new material through internal dialogue with oneself exemplify constructivism. Ideas around identity and becoming (a professional or an artist for example) are not generally discussed explicitly.

Humanism goes further. Though humanism is essentially constructivist in process, more emphasis is placed on a holistic stance which incorporates the affective domain. Though the *raison d'être* is often said to be about empowerment and emancipation, in terms of being and becoming, humanist perspectives perhaps focus on an inward looking "discovering of the real self" (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, p 53), generally for the purposes of building self-confidence and self-liking, for managing feelings of inadequacy and self doubt, and generally empowering individuals to convey a more authentic face to those around them. This idea is also emphasised by others, e.g. Barnett (2008 cited in Blackie *et al.*, 2010), who argues that ontological learning that develops the student's 'being' should be favoured over knowledge. There is

sometimes an expectation that this empowerment may result in social action (e.g. Freire, 1974), or result at least in increased civic responsibility (Rogers, 1961 cited in Blackie *et al.*, 2010).

Socio-cultural perspectives on identity in contrast move the focus from one which is essentially dualist separating self from society to a relational aspect. Identity becomes something that is mutually constructed between the individual and a social setting (Wenger, 1998), it is "the lived experience of identity" (p 145). Wenger is at pains to point out that the "unit of analysis" (p 146) can be neither the individual nor the societal setting, which is somewhat different from the perspectives of Rogers and Freiberg (1994) or Maslow (1970).

Again, I think it is useful to consider Sfard's (1998) metaphors here. In fact she visits this in the following:

> "whereas the [acquisition metaphor] stresses the way in which possession determines the identity of the possessor, the [participation metaphor] implies that the identity of an individual ... is a function of his or her being (or becoming) a part of a greater entity" (Sfard, 1998, p 6).

I have used this idea to distinguish between identity as described by the humanists and the socio-culturalists respectively, and to that end, have tentatively named the humanist form as *individuality* in the table below (Table 4).

Synopsis of a socio-cultural perspective

To conclude, I would like to summarise the socio-culturalist ideas, and as previously,

build a now expanded picture of how student-centred learning is referenced across all three perspectives to some degree (Table 4). In summary the key theme of socio-cultural thinking is that learning is seen less as an individual activity; rather, socio-cultural writers see that which is happening in the head of the learner and that happening in their learning environment as interdependent, inseparable and constantly evolving. The learning environment itself is also seen to have social, cultural, political and historic dimensions. There is greater emphasis therefore on the significance of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Ideas of student-centred learning that highlight aspects of identity, of becoming and being a member of a particular community of practice, more comfortably fit with socio-cultural views of learning. As can be seen, the table (Table 4) forms a synthesis of the literature review, and a starting point for considering the data later in the thesis.

There are a few points on which I would like to recap regarding the differentiations made in the table. Firstly, Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) description of identity as discussed is much more individualised than that within the socio-cultural perspective. Their emphasis and that of other humanists (e.g. Freire, 1974; Mezirow, 2009) is on self-actualisation. Identity in socio-cultural perspectives in contrast is akin to being part of a community, about engaging in the norms and discourse of that community, and about conforming to and at the same time influencing the norms of the community (Wenger, 1998). This is distinctly different from the humanists.

In terms of mode, Sfard (1998) doesn't discuss humanist conceptions specifically. I consider they are largely acquisitional and so have included this in the table.

	Constructivism	**Humanism**	***Socio-cultural***
Emphasis on	Cognitive	Sense of self	*Self integrated into social, cultural and historical community*
Ideas that exemplify	Self-regulation Metacognition Active engagement (e.g. Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006)	Ownership Confidence Self-belief (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) *Individuality*	*Dialogue across history and community* *Community of practice* *Identity* *Power* *(Wenger, 1998)*
Characterised by	Internal dialogue	Empowerment (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) Consciousness raising (Mezirow, 1999) *Becoming (oneself) (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Barnett, 2007 cited in Blackie et al., 2010)*	*Being and becoming (an active member of a community)* *(Wenger, 1998; Sfard, 1998)*
Mode	*Acquisition (Sfard, 1998)*	*Acquisition*	*Participation (Sfard, 1998)*

Table 4: Socio-cultural perspective on learning in comparison to constructivism and humanism, emphasising characteristics pertinent to student-centred learning. Comparative points and expansion of ideas from Tables 2 & 3 shown in italics.

Chapter 3

Research methodology

Introduction to the chapter

To answer the substantive research question:

> "What is the range of understanding of student-centred learning of academic staff supporting learning in art and design within the university of the researcher?"

I carried out an empirical study using primary data gathered from interviews with academic staff. These were contextualised through an interview with one of the senior management team and focus groups with students. I used a predominantly constructivist grounded approach using qualitative data collection and analysis methods. In this chapter I will discuss the rationale for selecting the overall methodology, and the chapter following will discuss the data collection and analysis methodology.

As stated in Chapter 1, my role is primarily as programme director for the Higher Education Academy accredited post-graduate certificate targeting probationary academic staff. My interest in this area of research was sparked as stated by conversations about the nature of student-centred learning within my institution and the subsequent snapshot survey carried out which, though not research rigorous, demonstrated a range of understandings from staff. The subsequent literature review and review of policy documents indicated that there were quite differing interpretations of student-centred learning, with some threads based more so in constructivist

understandings, but also significant ideas aligned with humanist and socio-cultural understandings of learning.

In determining the research methodology for this project, consideration was given to a wide range of determinants which would influence the choice ultimately made. These included ontological and epistemological considerations, and ideas around positivism and interpretivism, and these will be discussed in the context of this project.

The chapter will also be intermingled with personal reflections, and thus form a narrative of the history of the research as well. Research, I have found through this project, has many points of stopping, slowing down, and then racing ahead. In the final writing up I have gathered previous progress reports submitted to my supervisor as part of my ongoing development as a researcher and used these to reflect on how the research developed and changed as I progressed. I have also kept during the research period some often fairly rough 'notes to self'; these might have been summaries of what I understand by the subject at hand at that point in time, sometimes as bullet points, or tables or mind maps, or they may have been questions I was wrestling with. These I have dated, filed and reviewed from time to time. Most are no longer relevant or have been superseded, but some represent a unique point in the research where changes in direction were made and these are reflected in the writing. Some contain insights that have not surfaced since, and where these are relevant they have been included (as suggested by Alasuutari, 1995).

Ontological considerations

One of the first considerations when deciding on a research methodology was to think about how ontology and epistemology and my sense of these concepts might impact on this research project. For me, though these are distinct concepts, there is also inter-relatedness that impacts on research methodology, but also has implications for the research topic itself. Conceptions of learning are themselves tied in with ontology and epistemology and have been discussed already in Chapter 2 and will be included to some extent in the following discussion.

Firstly, I will tackle ontology and its implications. Ontology concerns:

> "basic questions about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p 183),

and broadly speaking there are two contrasting conceptions: objectivist and subjectivist (Totland, 1997). A point of note here is that while some writers (including myself in this thesis) use the terms objectivist and subjectivist, others (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 2005) use the term *relativist* as synonymous with subjectivist. An objectivist stance sees the world as relatively fixed, stable and predictable, and phenomena are able to be examined without any interference with the phenomena themselves. Phenomena exist independently of the researcher (Totland, 1997). This makes reasonable sense when thinking about science, and especially the physical sciences. Objects fall when dropped, velocity can be measured, and we can provide explanations of this phenomenon. Observing this phenomenon does not interfere with the phenomenon in any way, and sound assumptions can be made about predictability of this phenomenon in future and past occurrences. Results therefore can be formulated into theories which can be used to predict a similar occurrence.

When applied to humans, you might consider for example someone jumping off the high board. Velocity and other measurements could be made. However, in addition to this there may be other behavioural phenomena worth noting, such as whether the person shouted in triumph as they descended, or perhaps screamed, or prayed. These aspects of behaviour will be of immense interest to some researchers, but are clearly not fixed, stable responses; they may be influenced by social or cultural background and a myriad of other factors, and without a subjectivist stance would be ignored. As Martin (2006) describes, an objectivist world view would see people as stable, autonomous beings, the core of which is fixed, existing prior to cultural experience, and unchanged through history. A subjectivist stance in contrast sees the world as a dynamic, unpredictable entity and this is particularly pertinent when considering human action and interaction which are deeply influenced by social, cultural and historical factors, and constantly in a state of flux.

My sense of this so far

As I have noted, though there may be some common ground in the understanding of student-centred learning in the literature, there is no unique and definitive understanding. As well as that, my early impressions from the snapshot survey were that academic staff also have varied understandings of student-centred learning. As stated, I wished to undertake some empirical research by gathering data from academic staff within the university where I worked. To do so, it was fitting that I took a more subjectivist approach to this research to endeavour to unravel the factors which influence individual viewpoints, and to approach the research participants as individual case studies within a wider context. I wished to engage with academic staff within the cultural milieu that is their discipline, their department, and their own beliefs and

practices about teaching. From my experience working in higher education and previously in the health sector, it is apparent that 'realities' are bound by norms that are often local. For example, I used to work in health care and despite radiographers doing essentially the same job from hospital to hospital, the cultural norms within respective departments might be very different. This may for example determine the power differential between doctors and radiographers, and so impact significantly on how radiographers behave in the workplace. The same is evident in my teaching role. Different practices exist across the university from one working group to another; these in themselves may be the result of different ontological frames, e.g. from science to the humanities, but there is also 'the way things are done around here' in all working groups that may be historic, social or cultural. However, it doesn't stop there. Within groups there are also different 'realities', as Gergen notes: "is a tree the same object for a botanist, a forester, and a landscaper?" (Gergen, 2009, p 2). These different realities could not be explored without taking a subjectivist approach to the research.

Epistemological considerations

Tied to ontology is epistemology, the foundation on which knowledge is based. The underlying assumption in objectivist frames is that truth is a given and that there is a reality out there to be discovered by oneself and by researchers (Silverman, 2005; Miller & Glassner, 2004). This gives rise to dualist ideas of knowledge, it is either right or wrong, and findings are either true or false (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This assumption is perhaps more feasible and believable in research in the physical sciences though even here Kuhn (1970 cited in Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) would argue that no research is value-free.

Subjectivist frames which include the notion of social construction bring different ideas about what is 'truth'; it is a more slippery concept. It becomes something more uniquely personal, and often tends towards trying to gain understanding rather than a determinate explanation involving causal relationships (von Wright, 1971). Bell for example in talking about qualitative researchers (by which she means those with a subjectivist perspective) says they "doubt whether social 'facts' exist" (1999, p 7). Knowledge here is something that is mediated between researcher and research participant and for some researchers (e.g. Charmaz, 2000, 2001; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), it is accepted that it is also co-constructed in the research process. This is even before we consider the representation of truth: whether research participants are telling researchers what they the researcher wants to hear, or saying what the participant wants to believe, or what the participant actually does.

So having laid the ground, I now wish to consider how ontology and epistemology are central to a decision about research methodology, and then to outline my rationale for my project.

Positivism

Most commentators align an objectivist world view or ontology with positivist research methodologies aiming to find the 'truth' (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Cousin, 2010) though this is also contested (e.g. Rowbottom & Aiston, 2006). Though there are different descriptions of positivism (von Wright, 1971) there are key features that characterise it. For example, positivist researchers generally pose a hypothesis and test rigorously against this hypothesis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Also, often central to methodological decisions for positivists and objectivists is the scientific method as a standard, no matter what the disciplinary area under investigation (von

Wright, 1971). In the sciences this generally involves controlled experiments, and controlled experiments might also be used in the social sciences along with large scale gathering of statistical data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Causal relationships (of stimulus-response) are also central to positivist ideology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) with the result that "general laws" (von Wright, 1971, p 4) can be established that are reproducible and predictable.

Critics such as Rowbottom and Aiston (2006) mentioned above point out that a positivist approach does not necessary align with an objectivist ontology, and conversely a non-positivist approach doesn't align necessarily with a subjectivist ontology, and that these relationships have been over-simplified. Rolfe (2006 cited in Cousin, 2010) also claims that early interpretivist researchers agreed with positivists that the truth pre-existed in the data waiting to be discovered, and this idea is discussed again later in the chapter. However others (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 2005) whilst accepting cross-pollination within non-positivist or interpretivist approaches, consider positivism and interpretivism to be "mutually exclusive" (p 201). This however does not preclude using both qualitative and quantitative methods though I have chosen in this study to collect qualitative data as discussed later.

Non-positivist methodologies

Subjectivists wish to capture the nuances of social life and the socio-historical aspects that influence social interaction. Positivist research has been criticised for failing to capture the social environment (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Hammersley, 1993; Miller & Glassner, 2004), and the multiple realities, viewpoints and motivators that exist in everyday life. Subjectivists wish to capture the uniqueness of the research participants (von Wright, 1971), and for them, 'validity' rests on a methodology that

enables a more descriptive study of responses, thus giving rise to a range of interpretivist methodologies such as critical theory, constructivism, and participatory methodologies (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In contrast to positivist research which is outcome focused, this orientation allows process data not ordinarily gathered and used in positivist research to be captured (Miller & Glassner, 2004). Many writers (e.g. von Wright, 1971; Schwandt, 2000; de Landsheere, 1993) distinguish between positivist and interpretivist approaches using the terms *explanation* and *understanding.*

Interpretivism

Unlike positivist stances, interpretivism acknowledges that phenomena can be interpreted differently (Burgess *et al.*, 2006), and captures the different interpretations of a phenomenon by research subjects. Interpretivism also acknowledges that I too as a researcher will put my own interpretation on the data. To minimise this bias, ongoing reflexivity with respect to the interpretation of the data is necessary. Whilst a constructivist approach enables significant 'in action' clarifications and understandings to unfold, it is all too easy to retrospectively view text from transcripts as exactly representing views of research participants, when in reality, transcripts contain throw away lines said jokingly, or in isolation, which could be misconstrued if used carelessly. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

My approach in this study

As stated above, my first decision in this study was that I wished to collect empirical data. I have also already outlined my reasoning for conducting a subjectivist (or relativist) study rather than an objectivist one. It followed from this that I would also be working within a subjectivist epistemological frame and using an interpretivist

methodology. Just to reiterate this, my area of research was somewhat unclear given indications from the literature review and snapshot survey. There was no obvious hypothesis appropriate for testing; in fact setting a hypothesis and carrying out a large scale survey for example, was seen as detrimental to the study. An exploratory approach was seen as the most appropriate way to gather an understanding of the research question.

There are several recognised interpretivist methodologies: Guba and Lincoln (2005) specify three in particular: critical theory, constructivism, and participatory paradigms (p 195), and have noted that there is some osmosis between these paradigms. To a large extent I have chosen to use a constructivist methodology, to identify cases and use interviews and focus groups as the preferred data collection method, and to gather qualitative data. For the most part, I was drawn to constructivism because it acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed, a view dominant in the pedagogic literature, but also because I wished to use a methodology that acknowledged that an interview is an interaction, that the conversation is mutually constructed between the researcher and the participant (Silverman, 2006; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Miller & Glassner, 2004), and that allowed discussion. Because of the ambiguity in usage of many terms related to learning, including of course student-centred learning, I wanted the opportunity to tease out understandings of research participants. I also accepted that the research interview was formative for the research participant rather than the objectivist view that participants come to interviews with already formed knowledge that they then share with the researcher. I therefore decided that this may as well be exploited to the advantage of both myself as researcher but also for the research participants themselves. Constructivism was therefore embedded into the method and data analyses.

A constructivist grounded approach

I used a grounded approach to a large extent when collecting and analysing data. Though the literature review identified some themes with respect to student-centred learning, I wished to start afresh, and to undertake a study that was relatively open ended at the beginning at least. I wish to now outline the principles of grounded theory, and in particular to draw a distinction between early grounded theorists and constructivist grounded approaches. I will also outline to what extent I aligned myself with these ideas.

The basic principle of grounded theory is that it is "inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p 23). Thus analysis of the data would be undertaken as the data is collected and this informs future data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). So, interviews if used would be transcribed and analysed as they are conducted, themes would be identified, and these would inform the direction of future interviews with these or other participants; it might also inform the participant population itself, and the method of data collection. Through subsequent collection and analysis, the themes would be refined and shaped into a theoretical picture that explains the phenomena studied (Charmaz, 2001).

Charmaz (2001) has identified a divergence of direction of grounded theorists: those working in the objectivist and constructivist paradigms respectively. Grounded theory, as first described by Glaser and Strauss, despite being firmly grounded in a qualitative tradition, and to a large extent anti-positivist in that it is inductive rather than the hypothesis-testing deductive nature of positivistic research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), fails to acknowledge the constructivist nature of the data collection methods themselves (Charmaz, 2001). Charmaz notes an underlying assumption in Glaser and

Strauss' (1967) description that the data generated is representative of the participant's knowable world, rather like Rolfe's claim (2006 cited in Cousin, 2010) cited earlier in the chapter. Charmaz (2001) also notes Glaser and Strauss' (1967) idea that the researcher is portrayed as able to represent this truthfully, and in this sense their methodology is still positivistic in that the epistemological basis for this is that knowledge is 'truth', that it can be commodified, packaged, and thus transmitted from participant to researcher. Objectivists rely on the assumption that research participants will be able and willing to provide an accurate description of this knowable world, and that the researcher is and can remain external to the generation of the data (Charmaz, 2001). This attempt to 'ring-fence' data underpins standardisation responses in positivistic research where the researcher strives to minimise any noise within the data by standardising the questions and maintaining distance between the researcher and the participant (Silverman, 2006). Comparable arguments are used by naturalists such as ethnographers who also attempt to 'ring-fence' this data by immersing themselves in the cultural world of the observed and thus gaining an understanding of that world from within. However, this does not acknowledge that researchers are inevitably part of the social world they are studying and are not immune to value judgments (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). Charmaz notes that Glaser and Strauss' position was somewhat advanced by later publications (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998 cited in Charmaz, 2000) in which though still acknowledging this knowable world, does encourage a more dynamic approach to data collection to accommodate differing perspectives that may exist between participant and researcher.

Those researching within a constructivist grounded frame on the other hand see knowledge as being individually or collectively constructed, and so data collection cannot separate researcher from participant, nor participant or researcher from the research process itself. Constructivists favour an acknowledgment of this co-

construction, and use it to advantage by often taking a more interactional approach to the research method (Charmaz, 2001). The method then is seen as data making or data generating rather than data collection (Baker, 2004).

Charmaz' view resonated with me. I had no hesitation in accepting a constructivist influence to data collection especially where dialogic approaches are used, but also appreciated how constructivist any engagement between researcher and respondent can be no matter the method used. I also saw an advantage in using this constructivist aspect to tease out respondents' understandings of what might be quite difficult concepts especially in interactive situations; this would be difficult to stage with strict adherence to pre-determined questions.

I adhered to these principles to reasonable extent. The prompt questions (Appendix 1) used in the interviews were reasonably general, and mostly used to guide the interview. Interviews were transcribed and themes tentatively identified. Some formative changes were made as the research progressed. For example, it was after the initial interviews that a decision was made to focus on collecting data from lecturers in art and design rather than across three disparate disciplines; this is discussed in the next chapter. In addition, as stated in Chapter 1, because I had limited experience of teaching in an art and design context, I decided further into the research process to contextualise academic staff's responses with focus groups with students.

No changes were made to the prompt questions themselves. However, as my overall understanding of the subject area increased through the progression of the interviews, there was perhaps greater emphasis placed on some areas of discussion rather than

others as themes were identified. For example, as terms such as responsibility, empowerment, and identity came up regularly, I purposefully ensured that I gained an understanding of these from subsequent interviewees for comparative analysis. However, the grounded aspect of the data analysis never ceased. Themes were identified, but only tentatively. There was not in reality an ordered sequence of data collection, transcription, coding as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Certainly interviews were transcribed soon after undertaking, but the 'coding' process, and I used this term loosely, was an ongoing process of viewing recent interviews against previous, and developing an understanding of themes in an ongoing iterative process. More detail regarding the coding of the transcripts will be discussed in the next chapter.

Constructivist grounded approaches are not without methodological challenges. If one accepts constructivism, then there is an assumption that the interview itself is instrumental in assisting participants to shape and verbalise their social world, even when the researcher is attempting to minimise difference in approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004), and there is also an assumption that the narrative told to someone else may be somewhat different (Miller & Glassner, 2004). But in accepting this, then two aspects of data generation become significant: the 'what' of their social world, and the 'how' of the interview process that generates this data through interaction and mutual construction (as described by Holstein & Gubrium, 2004). Silverman (2006) also makes the point that if, as is assumed by constructionism (he uses this term synonymously to constructivism), all knowledge is mutually constructed through interaction, then this would indicate that the only legitimate analysis would be on the 'how', the dynamics of the conversation, how information was revealed rather than the information itself. This raises somewhat of a dilemma for researchers including myself.

A compromise of sorts has been reached by many researchers. Holstein and Gubrium (2004), whilst favouring analysis of both the 'how' and the 'what' suggest a leaning towards the 'what'. At the outset of the research, I acknowledged that though the 'what' is the more significant in determining teachers' understanding of student-centred learning, the 'how' could also be revealing in determining how development of teachers' conceptions could be undertaken since this forms a significant part of my role in the university. In reality, I did not undertake any analysis as such of the 'how', however, it is probable that as I progressed through the interviews and gained more experience I may have altered the way I asked questions, perhaps the number of questions, and perhaps the way I settled respondents into the interview process in response to former interviews. I became more adept at soliciting understandings over time. This will be discussed in more detail later when talking about the interviews *per se*.

In conclusion, after consideration I decided to use a predominantly constructivist grounded approach using qualitative data collection and analysis methods. In the next chapter, I wish to provide more detail on how this was actioned through the data collection process, predominantly through case interviews, and the subsequent analysis.

Chapter 4

Data collection and analysis

Introduction to the chapter

In the last chapter, I provided a rationale for selecting a predominantly constructivist grounded approach to the research. I now wish to consider how I applied this to the data collection and analysis methods.

Using case studies

As stated, the research was focused around case studies, and interviews were selected as the primary data collection method. In the last chapter, I discussed my decision to focus primarily on the 'what' of the social world of the research participants rather than the 'how' of using the constructivist approach. As Yin (2009) states:

> "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p 4),

a situation that I have argued in the last chapter is my desired aim. The cases studied in this research are individuals; however, as I have alluded to already, they are practising within the local cultural milieu of the discipline and department, and bringing their own beliefs and practices with them.

Methodological implications for the interviews

As stated, interviews formed a significant proportion of the data collection. These were semi-structured, using a pre-determined list of prompt questions representing themes I wished to discuss. The prompt questions will be discussed shortly.

It was accepted that the interview as a method was by its dialogic nature constructivist; Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe it as:

> "an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (p 2)

through which knowledge is created. As discussed, I saw this as an advantage to be maximised, by enabling ideas to be teased out through follow-up questions determined by the progress of the interview. The interview would be data making as well as data collecting as stated earlier (Baker, 2004), and would represent a learning opportunity for both the research participant and myself (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Through the interview, I sought both phenomenological and hermeneutic outcomes. Phenomenology is the study of one's life world, as viewed from that person (van Manen, 1997 cited in Laverty, 2003). I was interested in the teaching experiences of the research participants, what pressures they face, how they deal with them, what interests them as teachers, that is, what does teaching (and learning) feel like from their perspective. This is the phenomenological aspect of the interview process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Hermeneutics is concerned with the interpretation of texts, which could include verbal interaction as well as written text (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Laverty, 2003). At the same time as considering the interviews from a phenomenological aspect, I also through the discursive (and also reflexive) process, wished to arrive at a valid interpretation of what participants were saying. I wanted to gain meaning, and for this, I needed to think beyond the interview to the teaching context, the local culture, and perhaps personal values that influenced their ideas (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In addition through the analysis process of moving from part to whole and back I endeavoured to build depth of understanding of the data. This is what is known as the hermeneutic circle (Laverty, 2003) and is discussed again later in the chapter.

The pilot interviews

Before I discuss the main body of data collection and to give some context to the research process I would like to outline the beginnings. There were a couple of false starts to this research project, and these revolved around two areas: who the research participants would be, and the style of the questioning itself. From the outset I had decided that a purposive sample (Silverman, 2005) would best serve to gather relevant data. The nature of purposive sampling is discussed later in the chapter, but I would like to illustrate here how the pilot interviews enabled clarification of the sample. Initially I had planned a broad (in terms of discipline) range of participants from alumni of the Post-graduate Certificate aimed at new teaching staff and for which I am programme director. This decision was made because they were staff I knew personally and I was confident that I would be able to gain access to them without difficulty. I carried out three interviews in my first year using fairly general questions about learning, participants' own experiences as a learner, their experiences as a new teacher, and elicited examples from their teaching. I transcribed the interviews in full.

I learnt a lot from these interviews, firstly about interviewing as a process. Though I had conducted interviews before, this area of research had much more complexity. I was also much more self-critical in the process and suddenly I felt very much a novice, unsure how much to direct the interview, whether comments during the interview 'contaminated the data', and generally lacked confidence in managing the interview process. From the transcripts I could see points where I could have worded questions better, where I could have asked useful follow-up questions, and where I should have been more assertive in bringing the conversation back to the topic.

It was also apparent because the topic was complex that the questions needed more thought. On the one hand they needed to be more specific to the research question but at the same time less directly addressing learning as a construct. They needed to be simpler and more accessible, and thus I tied some of the questions in later interviews to the learning outcomes of the programme participants teach within. In fact, this produced more complexity in response than the pilot interviews. I also through thinking through the 'contamination' issue, made the decision to use a constructivist methodology as discussed.

Following these interviews, and having gained confidence as a researcher, I decided to interview academic staff from one well-defined course from three separate disciplines, namely art and design, the humanities and science. I also decided to begin by interviewing a member of the senior management team to gain some perspective from a strategic point of view and to contextualise the subsequent interviews. I re-designed the question format; this was used for the main part of the study and is discussed in more detail below. I tried out the new format on a colleague and conducted four

interviews initially, two respondents from art and design, and two from humanities. These were transcribed as they were carried out, and there followed a further period of thematic analysis and reflection. After some consideration it was decided that the study would proceed using only academic staff from art and design, and I have only used data from the art and design participants in the analysis. This decision was for a number of reasons which were discussed in Chapter 1 but will be restated here:

- Art and design offered an environment where transmission-style teaching was unlikely or expected to be unlikely because of the predominantly studio environment
- The subtleties of difference within an art and design context appeared more interesting and useful to explore in the context of the research question than the much more significant differences between more major shifts in discipline
- There appeared from the early data collection to be elements of all three perspectives on learning expressed to greater or lesser extent
- Art and design offered a more transparent teaching environment in which to gather data, especially on humanist conceptions of learning, compared to the humanities
- Academic staff in art and design, because of the studio environment, appeared to be more familiar with students' sense of engagement because of the greater degree of feedback opportunities
- Art and design offered an environment where though career paths are not explicitly defined, there is a sense of a community because of the focus on studio learning, and also it offered an opportunity to explore the concept of the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) with respect to the wider art world.

Research participants therefore were sought from courses within art and design.

The interview questions

As discussed, coming in cold with abstract questions was not easy for an interviewee, and yet I wished to connect the data with ideas around student-centred learning. Having accepted the constructivist nature of the interview process, I accepted that this is happening at every stage of the process, and that research participants' understanding of a concept would be undergoing change before I approached them, between the approach and the interview, during the interview, and after the interview. Having provided participants with an information sheet outlining the scope of the research (and discussed later with respect to ethics), it was evident to them that student-centred learning was the topic of conversation, and that this would be discussed in the context of their own teaching. To a large extent, I expected that those who agreed to be interviewed already had a sense of what they thought student-centred learning was and what it meant to them, and/or that they might Google-search so that they felt more confident in their convictions. Either way, having rejected positivist epistemologies of pre-formed ideas waiting to be extracted by me in favour of co-constructing, this was acceptable.

I decided however, it would be useful to prompt this reflection on student-centred learning by asking participants (both academic staff and the senior manager) to email me a short response to the question *What do you understand by student-centred learning?* This also served as an initial response to this question, which might have been difficult to do within an interview situation, and this then formed part of the conversation we had face to face.

The prompts used to conduct the interviews are attached (Appendices 1 & 2). The following discussion focuses predominantly on the main part of the study, that with

academic staff and I will start by framing the underpinning of the interview prompts. As stated, I was interested in conceptions of student-centred learning and in particular ideas around constructivism, humanism and socio-cultural perspectives. To ease into the interview, I framed the discussion around research participants' teaching, something that they were familiar and comfortable with, rather than an unfamiliar discourse. I used the learning outcomes from the programme in which they teach, and asked for examples from their teaching to initiate discussions at different stages. Though the themes in the interview questions are structured in a linear fashion, starting from talking about learning generally, then ideas around student-centred learning, the team ethos, wider perspectives including the university learning and teaching strategy and finally empowerment in particular, the conversation was less structured, as some conversations naturally led onto others in a more organic fashion. Overall though, the general themes were discussed in all interviews.

To delve more deeply into particular aspects of student-centred learning I used two further prompt sheets which I shared with participants during the interview. The first (Appendix 3) was two broad perspectives on student-centred learning and was presented about halfway through the interview. Generally it was introduced and framed around interpretations already presented by the participant and so was sometimes used as a partial validation. However its purpose was to prompt further reflection and consideration of other perspectives and thus further dialogue.

The other prompt (Appendix 4) was adapted for the purposes of this research from Whetton *et al.* (2000) to represent a more education related environment, and enabled a more detailed exploration of empowerment in particular, as I was especially interested in engaging with humanist aspects of teaching. This prompt, fashioned

under several headings, had several sub-questions. Participants were asked to read all the questions under for example *Self-efficacy*, and to respond generally. Again reference was made to ideas already put forward, and this provided an opportunity for these to be expanded or for some staff a 'way-in' to the discussion, and to introduce different examples into the conversation.

The prompts overall though gave some structure to the interview without stifling conversation. There were times when the interviewee went off the topic in question; sometimes I permitted some diversion, sometimes I brought the conversation back to the topic in hand. This was largely determined on a case by case basis.

It is worth noting here the difference between "espoused theories" and "theories-in-use" as discussed by Argyris and Schön (1996, p 13). The primary focus of the research as stated was lecturers' conceptions of student-centred learning. These conceptions as one would expect are shaped by and embedded in their value systems and perhaps that of their teaching team, their discipline and/or the university as a whole. Argyris and Schön draw a distinction between one's espoused theory as that which is "advanced to explain or justify a given pattern of activity" (p 13) and one's theory-in-use which is constructed by individuals through engagement in the activity and interaction with others.

As stated, because of the complexity of the subject and the difficulties of talking about student-centred learning in the abstract, I also used the learning outcomes of modules staff taught to initiate conversation, and unravel the intricacies of student-centred learning. I thus gained an insight into their practice and the way they construct their

interpretation of student-centred learning in their practice. As suggested by Argyris and Schön (1996), one's theories-in-use do not always directly relate to one's espoused theory, and this will be demonstrated in the findings chapters. The implications of this will be discussed further in the concluding chapter.

Power in the interview

Miller & Glassner (2004) highlight problems that might arise because of the power differential that may exist between researcher and participant and point out that mutual trust and building a relationship with the research participant is essential to both parties communicating effectively. The interview, even between colleagues, is not a power-free dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As the researcher, I have done the inviting, set the topic of conversation, asked the questions and moved the conversation on when necessary. I also have control when it comes to interpretation of participants' responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, mindfulness of these issues can at least alleviate this. Providing information for participants prior to the event and meeting course groups beforehand contributed to participants feeling more comfortable with the interview process. Providing the initial question on student-centred learning also possibly contributed to participants feeling more empowered in the interview; they had time to reflect and research if they wished. Managing the interview process sensitively, and being reflexive in the analysis also contribute to the integrity of the research process, and these are discussed elsewhere.

Ethical issues

Linked to this are ethical considerations which permeate every aspect of the research. As stated above, the interview, in fact the whole research project, is saturated with

power issues from the research question, to design, implementation and analysis. Purposeful consideration of ethical issues was undertaken at several stages of the research. Ethics approval was sought each year from the university ethics committee, and participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form (Appendices 5, 6 & 7) before the interview took place. The consent form was then signed by the participant and witnessed by myself before the interview began. Research participants were assured that every effort would be made to ensure anonymity such as a private meeting place, acceptable data storage procedures, anonymising the university, and removal of names in the reporting of the research. These are fairly standard procedures for ethical consideration, and assist as stated above, in creating a more trustworthy relationship with interviewees. I was mindful of establishing an ongoing sense of trust with the interviewee, through approaching the interview with sensitivity, and also for example, gave participants the opportunity at the end of the interview to retract any statement they might consider was compromising.

The cases

The research participants for the main study were drawn from staff within the university where I work, and specifically and principally as outlined from art and design. As I have stated earlier, I used purposive sampling as opposed to random sampling (Silverman, 2005) to select cases to invite to participate. Silverman (2005) describes purposive sampling as illustrating "some feature or process in which we are interested" (p 129). Certainly I wished to target academic staff specifically (as opposed to technical demonstrators for example) since they set the timbre of the course. As stated earlier in the chapter however, the focus of the sample changed somewhat through the pilot interview process, from a sample across three disciplines to one focused on art and design, and this was principally because the data seemed to indicate that a more meaningful interpretation would be possible.

The purposiveness also therefore took into account theoretical considerations (Silverman, 2005) in that the participant group was also targeted because it appeared to be more illustrative of the wider range of theoretical underpinnings that I wished to use to shape the interpretation and analysis, i.e. constructivist, humanist and socio-cultural conceptions of learning.

The research participants, as stated, were sought from within the university where I also work. Focusing the research within my own workplace was primarily done for expediency, given the time involved in undertaking an exploratory study through interviews. Access to research participants therefore was fairly straightforward, however none (apart from the senior manager interviewed for contextual purposes) were known to me personally.

As also stated, I decided to focus my study on those teaching within an art and design context. Art and design courses within Celtic University are varied; at the time of the study they were small discrete courses ranging from those at the fine art end of the spectrum (such as painting and sculpture), to craft courses with a fine art bias, to courses focused on design and therefore driven primarily through others' briefs and commissions. All students work within a studio environment.

For the main part of the study, programme directors were initially approached to seek permission to interview staff within their team. Following assent, all staff within a course group were invited by email to be part of the study, and this was done course by

course as the research progressed. There was some variability course by course as to numbers of participants.

The organisation of the interviews for the main body of data

On email invitation, the information sheet and consent form were attached. For all groups, I offered to come and talk to them at an opportune time prior to the interviews to discuss the broad scope of the research and answer any questions. Two of the three groups took up this offer, and this was a useful opportunity to put faces to names both for me and for them. The numbers invited and that agreed to be interviewed were as follows (Table 5):

	Number invited	Number who agreed to be interviewed
Course A	6	5
Course B	6	2
Course C	6	1
TOTAL INTERVIEWED		**8**

Table 5: Respective numbers of participants invited and who agreed to be interviewed for the main body of work.

All were staff from art and design courses as stated. A convenient location and time for the interview was agreed, and on arrival, questions answered and the consent form signed. Demographic information was not collected, for example, their years of teaching experience or whether they had undertaken any teacher training. I did however preserve the gender of the research participants through the pseudonyms

chosen. This additional demographic information might have been useful and would have provided a further point of analysis for the data.

All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and subsequently transcribed by me using an interpretative method (Gibson, 2008). Transcriptions varied in complexity; most were transcribed in full, others were only partly transcribed if it was felt some sections were irrelevant to the research question. This decision was made for reasons of expedience. However, I valued the opportunity to transcribe my own data as it gave me an opportunity to consider themes as I transcribed, and also to 'hear the voice'. I returned to the audio files several times during the analysis as will be discussed. Transcriptions however were not fully annotated with paralinguistic and extralinguistic aspects (Gibson, 2008) as given the relative lack of sensitivity of the data, I did not consider this necessary.

On the whole, I was satisfied with the interviews for the main part of the study. The pilot study gave me the opportunity to gain experience and reflect on the process of interviewing, transcribing and the nuances of managing the process effectively and ethically. Generally after each interview I continued to take the time to reflect on it, and consider any changes for next time, not so much the organisation or guide questions, but the small nuances, an extra question there, a longer pause there that might have improved the interview. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) list some tips for new interviewers (pp 89-90). Of these I think there are two of which I still need to be mindful. The first is managing the conversation when it goes off topic; I could have done this better. Another useful idea was repeating or clarifying inaudible answers during the interview. There were a few inaudible sections in the audiotapes which caused me some frustration; being more experienced makes one more mindful of this

whilst interviewing. This also could have been alleviated by using a second Dictaphone as in the focus groups as discussed below.

The preliminary interview with the Senior Manager

As stated, prior to the main body of data collection, I interviewed one of the senior managers to gain her perspective on student-centred learning and to provide some strategic and externally-informed context to the subsequent interviews. As with the other interviews, I sought ethical approval, provided an information sheet and asked her to confirm informed consent (Appendices 6 & 7). The interview was again transcribed; the prompt questions are attached (Appendix 2). This interview, as with the main body of research, sought understandings of student-centred learning, but also sought views on its integration into Celtic University's learning and teaching strategy, and the wider drivers for change from HEFCW and central government. The aim was to gain a sense of the contextual frame from a management perspective, and perhaps because I know this manager reasonably well, I found it a useful starting point. She was relaxed and appeared to talk reasonably freely about the political challenges of her position.

The subsequent focus groups with students

Following the interviews with academic staff, I decided to run some focus groups with students to provide some context to the responses made by academic staff, and to enhance my overall understanding of learning and teaching in an art and design context. The general principles informing the interviews also applied to the focus groups, i.e. an acceptance of the constructivist nature of interaction, and issues around power and ethics. Ethical approval was sought through the university ethics

committee; all participants were assured of anonymity and signed informed consent (Information sheet and consent form appended; Appendices 8 & 9).

Second and third year students from Courses A and B were invited. The programme directors of the respective programmes were consulted, and timing of the focus groups was agreed to fit in with their course schedules. Invitations to students to participate were disseminated via their programme director. Two focus groups were scheduled, one for each course; seven students attended each of the respective focus groups. The sampling was again purposive as it was principally to contextualise lecturers' comments; however because it was through invitation, students effectively self-selected. The sample was facilitated by the programme director, and therefore I was mindful that there may be some bias in the group. It was noted that the Course A students represented were mostly female and the Course B students mostly male; it is unknown whether these were representative of the second and third year groups of these courses. However, as with the interviews, the information sheet confirmed participants could withdraw at any stage, and so I was satisfied no coercion had taken place. I also sought some confirmation of students' comments by consulting the qualitative data from previous National Student Surveys collected by Ipsos MORI (2009; 2010) from graduates of the respective courses. The qualitative comments cannot be quoted since they are not available in the public domain, however, the nature of the comments collected in January 2009 when courses were disaggregated was very similar to that gathered from the focus groups. The following year comments were combined across several courses and so judgment was more difficult. It needs to be stated that though this was prior to enrolment of some of the students from the focus groups, the courses and staffing have not changed substantially.

The focus group questions

The questions (Appendix 10) were derived from the analysis of the interviews, and reflected the key themes I wished to discuss in the reporting of the research. Themes such as respective responsibilities, empowerment and metacognition were explored, and students were asked to talk about their experiences of these ideas, how they might have changed since school and whilst they were at university, and principally how academic staff had helped their development of these ideas.

The focus groups were recorded, and because I was concerned that with greater numbers the audiotapes would be more difficult to hear, I used two Dictaphones, one of which I regularly used and I could transcribe using a foot pedal, and another which I borrowed, which was designed for groups with a very sensitive multi-directional microphone. This proved to be incredibly useful, as the quality of the recording was far superior to mine. However, it would have been difficult to use alone as it was not compatible with the transcription software. Nevertheless, the combination made the transcription much easier in an environment where some voices tumbled over others from time to time, and the distances were greater.

I was very pleased with how the focus groups proceeded, in particular that from Course A. Students were very animated and unrestrained in their responses. Given the main purpose of the focus groups was to contextualise lecturers' comments, this data has not been reported on in full, but is used to provide further insight into the teaching space, and in doing so, provides some confirmation of lecturers' comments in the findings chapters.

Data analysis using a grounded approach

The coding process began by reading the transcripts several times as they were conducted, noting particular phenomena that might be significant (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I most often expressed these as verbs as encouraged by Charmaz (2000) (e.g. building on successes, gaining confidence) but other aspects were also noted such as particular teaching methodologies, for example *pecha kucha* (Klein & Dytham, n.d., a presentation format used in the arts and described more fully in Chapter 5), and participants' use of particular terms that might be relevant (e.g. autonomy). It was planned that the codes would be predominantly grounded rather than *a priori* (Gibbs & Taylor, 2005). Gibbs and Taylor (2005) state that:

> "grounded codes emerge from the data because you put aside your prejudices, presuppositions and previous knowledge ... and concentrate instead on finding new themes in your data" (p 1).

I don't think this accurately conveys the process in reality however, especially given the argument I have used already to justify a constructivist approach. Certainly themes emerged from the data that I had not considered in the literature review, but I believe it is through the purposeful reflection and subsequent shaping of my presuppositions and prior knowledge that these have emerged, rather than 'putting previous knowledge aside'. So whilst I consider some themes have emerged from the data, rather than *a priori*, I think there is some blurring of the boundaries between these. I have however tried to purposefully start from the data and look outwards towards the literature.

This also raises the question of where *a priori* knowledge of the environment itself fits in, and thus the idea of the insider/ outsider researcher (Hellawell, 2006). I am researching within the organisation within which I work, and thus am familiar with the language and culture within the organisation to a large extent, and am able therefore to

communicate and build a rapport with the research participants in a way that perhaps an outsider may not be able to do. I am also though researching a group I am unfamiliar with, in a discipline with its own discourse with which I am unfamiliar. Hellawell (2006) suggests that it is useful to be both insider and outsider and to a large extent, I think that is how I have experienced it.

Following initial coding, Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2000) then suggest a process of grouping these phenomena into more abstract categories using the constant comparative method. As I did so, categories such as examining identity, developing self-efficacy, and empowerment emerged. This gave me a sense of the overall picture of what staff were saying, and guided the way the data was presented. I then started to consider these categories with respect to constructivist, humanist and socio-cultural perspectives of learning. I found that though I had grouped ideas that surfaced in the data into more complex categories, I found myself returning to the transcripts and the audiotapes to more fully get a sense of what the research participants were both saying and meaning. So the process of focusing inwards then moving outwards and vice versa was iterative and continuous, and indeed hermeneutic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) as suggested earlier in the chapter. So though coding served a purpose for examining the data in the first instance, it also felt somewhat contrived, and I felt more comfortable considering statements within the context of the whole. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) talk about three different forms of analysis focused on meaning. The first two are "meaning coding" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p 201), which aligns with Charmaz' (2000) and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) ideas, and "meaning condensation" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p 205), where meanings derived from interviews are abridged into shorter forms. Both they suggest could be viewed as traditional in the sense that there might be an assumption of data as pre-existing and awaiting the researcher to 'collect'. In the third form of analysis, "meaning interpretation" (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009, p 207), they suggest the researcher goes beyond what has been said to a more expansive interpretation (rather than the text reduction idea above) as the meaning is interpreted within a wider frame of reference which opens the door to perhaps multiple interpretations. Furthermore multiple interpretations are legitimised when considering analysis from this point of view (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). To a large extent, I think I have done a combination of firstly meaning coding and then meaning interpretation. Meaning interpretation has enabled me to view the interviews through the three lenses of perspective that I selected and conceivably could be operating consciously or subconsciously simultaneously. It has meant that in the findings chapters some statements from the transcripts are considered from more than one perspective, each providing a respective slant on the statement. I think this has provided a richer interpretation as a result.

In addition, some quotes or part-quotes are repeated with emphasis on different parts or aspects of these quotes in the discussion in order to capture the essence in context. Again, I think this adds to the richness of the discussion. An example of a transcript with coding is appended (Appendix 11).

Selection and presentation of the data

As stated the research process is saturated with ethical issues including how and why particular data is selected and presented. In this study, I have tried to balance an *a priori* decision to frame the research around the three perspectives of constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism with a methodology that is constructivist and evolving. I have also whilst undertaking the research become more interested in the fuller narrative histories of some of the participants, and so this has influenced my choice of data presented. In some instances, sentiments were similar for several participants;

only a selection of these data was included. Some interviews were more useful than others; sometimes it was difficult to engage participants even when talking about their own subject area. This, along with a growing interest in the narrative form, have influenced the selection of data. I have however, tried to maintain an exploratory stance, and present the most appropriate data in the findings chapters.

Consideration of data analysis from a "meaning interpretation" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p 207) perspective as discussed above opens up possibilities with respect to data presentation. As suggested above, multiple interpretations are legitimate, but also other forms of data presentation are also legitimised. I have to a large extent presented the data around the three key perspectives addressed in the literature review in the subsequent chapters. I have also though used some narrative forms to enrich the reader's appreciation of the research participants' stories, and to give some authenticity to the participants. These have taken two forms: firstly I used some of the written responses to the initial question about student-centred learning to present an introduction to some of the research participants. These *first thoughts* were annotated to some extent for clarity but essentially participants' words are left unchanged. The second form presented is a reconstructed narrative (as described in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p 286) of the contextual interview with the senior manager, the *Senior Manager's story.* In this case, I have re-written her story capturing the main points she wished to communicate, but my words too have been included. I think these two forms provide perspective to the findings chapters, and give further voice to the research participants.

Claims made about the data and generalisability

I now move to the notion of generalisability of the cases studied. The nature of the research project has meant that some conclusions cannot be made. For example, because it was interpretivist rather than positivist in itself indicates that I believe there would not be a fixed unequivocal claim or claims made about student-centred learning. In addition, I used purposive sampling, which again mitigates against making precise inferences across a broader sector of higher education. However, I would like to argue that the examination of the cases studied have merit for the following reasons.

Firstly, the cases have intrinsic value (Stake, 2005; also Stake, 2000 cited in Silverman, 2005; Stake, 1994 cited in Gomm *et al.*, 2000). They are interesting in themselves; these are some of our academic staff. Though the focus of the research was student-centred learning, I have from time to time in undertaking this project, considered the cases in their "particularity" (Stake, 2005, p 445). Thus, I have presented the Senior Manager's interview in a narrative form and have treated her testimony as having intrinsic characteristics of interest to readers. I have also presented three of the lecturers' first thoughts as annotated extracts, to try to capture this essence. The research participant Mary has perhaps been given more airtime than some of the others; to some extent this gives her views greater intrinsic value. The cases have also to some extent captured the differential between "espoused theories" and "theories-in-use" (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p 13) which will be discussed again in the concluding chapter.

At the same time, I believe the cases have instrumental value (Stake, 2005; Stake, 2000 cited in Silverman, 2005); that they enabled insight into a particular idea. The purpose of the research was to gain some insight into how student-centred learning

was conceptualised by lecturers, so that this would provide some generalisable claims. For many of the participants, their views were treated as part of a developing picture of understanding, or of several understandings. The purposive nature of the research participant group was part of this decision; they were chosen because of their greater perceived value in teasing out insights into student-centred learning. However, the commonality of all being teachers in art and design did not mean that they were a homogeneous group. There was still considerable variety among them, and perhaps this would provide an argument for indicating that they might as a group be more accurately considered a collective case study (Stake, 2005). As Stake (2005) has suggested, research doesn't necessarily fit precisely into categories, and like my argument above regarding coding, I have not fitted strictly into a typology. However, I believe the research is the better for it.

Perhaps though, what has been the most interesting to me has not been where research participants fit into a generalised idea of student-centred learning but where their ideas stand apart, and it has been through teasing out the uniqueness that a greater appreciation of student-centred learning has unfolded. This uniqueness with respect to research is not generally valued because findings cannot be applied directly to wider populations and so theories cannot eventuate (e.g. Stake, 2005). However, there remain generalisations in terms of typicality; other academic staff will see themselves in this data through "naturalistic generalisation" (Stake, 2000, p 22). They will be able to abstract the discussion to their own teaching situation, and perhaps see it in a different way. They will enrich their own schema of understanding (Donmoyer, 2000) and so the onus moves to the reader of the research to determine typicality (Gomm *et al.*, 2000), and this forms a conduit in my view with a constructivist methodology in the first place.

Conclusions

Having decided to use a constructivist grounded approach, I undertook the research through case studies, and have used interviews predominantly to collect data. I have also used a broad palette of data analysis methods, which I believe has provided a more rounded engagement with the data. I now wish to discuss the findings through the three following chapters.

Chapter 5

Findings: constructivist perspective

Introduction to the chapter

This is the first of three chapters where findings will be presented and discussed. As outlined, the substantive data was solicited through interviews with academic staff, and these were augmented by an initial question sent via email before the interview. Context was derived from an initial interview with one of the senior management staff, and follow-up focus groups with students were also conducted to provide further context in a teaching environment less familiar to me.

Staff in art and design were asked about their understanding of student-centred learning, about what they did in their teaching practice that they considered student-centred, and more generally about the way they delivered the curriculum. The findings chapters will consider their responses from each of the three perspectives outlined in the literature review, namely constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism, and to a large extent will mirror these sections thematically.

The data presented will have been derived from academic staff through either the interview or the initial question *What do you understand by student-centred learning?* and will be differentiated where necessary by reference to either *interview* or *first thoughts.* Data will also be presented that has been derived from the focus groups with students, and will be referred to as *focus group.* The term *transcripts* will also be used to denote the data more generally.

In this chapter, the findings around student-centred learning will firstly be discussed with respect to transmission models: to what extent do academic staff see student-centred learning as transmission of knowledge or as something removed from these commodified conceptions of knowledge. Following this, I will consider whether the attitudes they adopt and the teaching they describe would be considered constructivist in frame, knowingly or unknowingly. This will be organised thematically, and though emphasis has been generated from the data itself, the themes map reasonably well with the ideas generated from the literature review. The themes presented are:

- Responding to students' needs
- Responsibility for learning
- Active engagement
- Reflecting and evaluating: self-regulation
- Dissonance and challenge
- Metacognition
- Interacting.

Following this, using art and design as a context, consideration will be given to whether constructivism is a satisfactory conception within which to think about student-centred learning, and to identify its shortcomings. These findings will cast doubt on the utility of solely constructivist conceptions which have typically framed much of the writing on student-centred learning.

To introduce the chapter, there will be a brief recap of the main points of constructivism. Then I will present and discuss the interview with the senior manager before introducing the research participants through three short extracts.

Re-visiting constructivism

As stated in the literature review, much of the language associated with constructivism is also associated with writings on student-centred learning. Constructivist perspectives focus on the cognitive aspects of learning. Learning is seen as an individual's capacity to construct new understanding by considering its viability against what is understood already (von Glasersfeld, 1999 cited in Poerksen, 2004; von Glasersfeld, 1990). This requires active engagement with the subject area in contrast to transmission models, and this engagement may be on one's own or with others. In either case, the learner is going through a process of reflecting and evaluating, and what may be initially idiosyncratic knowledge may move toward a more common understanding of the subject.

As outlined in the literature review, learning environments which maximised this construction would provide opportunities for students to actively experiment, and to have the time and opportunity to reflect and weigh up new learning (JISC, 2004). Creating dissonance is seen by many as an impetus to constructing new understandings (e.g. von Glasersfeld, 1990), though this can also be problematic if the dissonance is too great (e.g. Meyer & Land, 2006).

What is necessary is some kind of 'interaction' and I use this term loosely, to enable this re-shaping of knowledge to happen. This as stated can happen on one's own,

through an internal dialogue as a result of reading, digesting and reflecting. Where a more common and convergent understanding of a subject is desired, feedback from staff can provide a face to face or written dialogue point which might encourage further understanding. Increasingly universities are encouraging students to work together through peer working, peer assessment and group projects to provide opportunities for discussion and thus amplify the internal dialogue that takes place (e.g. JISC, 2004; Biggs, 2003; Richardson, 2003).

Setting the scene: the interview with senior management

Before embarking on the interviews of academic staff, a member of the senior management team was interviewed in order to gain an overview of Celtic University's policy response to government's policy, and to gain an insight into student-centred learning as a construct from her point of view. This provided background to the interviews that followed and will be discussed in terms of government and university policy, both outlined in Chapter 1, but first, I wish to present her story as a narrative.

Senior Manager's story

Higher education, like other sectors, is unsustainable in terms of public funding, and so we are moving towards a user-oriented model of education. My main concern about this is how continued support will be offered to those students from poor backgrounds, but the Welsh Assembly Government appear to be mindful of this. When I started working in higher education, there was an emphasis on content-driven teaching, then a greater emphasis on students and how they learn which I see as student-centredness and a customer orientation. Now I think we are moving towards a new stage of collaboration between students and staff.

As part of the management team, I am aware that student-centred learning is interpreted in different ways; those of us who see it as focusing on learning, to those who might see it as a more efficient way of learning thus saving money, and so, though these interpretations might be different, the 'idea' can be used to garner change in the institution even though different people will be getting something different out of the change.

Employability agendas have been a key driver for student-centred learning; employers are saying students are not equipped with employment related skills, and many of these skills like adaptability and metacognition are better learnt in active learning environments which are student-centred. As well as that, access to information has changed markedly with the internet, and so universities have to offer something extra, and so there is more emphasis on criticality.

In focusing on learning, we have to be aware of what enables people to learn, which might include very practical or pragmatic ideas such as the distance travelled to university each day. At the same time, student-centred learning requires student responsibility; it is not just about responding to needs. Responding to needs puts fear into staff because it seems to imply the buying of a degree. Change has to come from both estates and teaching staff; teaching staff are often the most resistant because lectures are efficient. Students are also resistant because lectures are what they expect of university.

Discussion of the Senior Manager's position

Celtic University does appear to have encompassed the ongoing political agenda through its learning and teaching policy already discussed. Employability appears to be the principal driver for a changing focus in the way learning and teaching is viewed; this is also evident in the current learning and teaching strategy already discussed, and is a key driver in current consultations on the new strategy (mentioned in Chapter 1). This is perhaps more so in Wales because it is still relatively impoverished as a nation (Jones, 2009), and this too was recognised in the Senior Manager's concern for ongoing support for those in need of financial assistance.

So, as a scene-setting exercise, there appear to be some clear messages: employability is best served by a student-centred approach, and vice versa, focusing more on the student as a learner also develops skills that make students more employable. At the same time, there is an expectation of thinking about the student as more than just a learner but as a person who needs to manage their learning life, which might include travel, children and work. Nevertheless there is a clear message that

learning responsibility needs to be apportioned, and perhaps this is underlying the vision of moving towards a more collaborative approach between staff and students.

Introduction to some of the research participants

I would now like to introduce the dataset used in this chapter by providing three short annotated extracts taken from the initial questions posed to research participants about student-centred learning. It is worth noting at this point to what degree these lecturers see student-centred learning as something other than commodified interpretations. They have been annotated primarily for clarity, without removing the overall meaning intended.

Steve's first thoughts

My interpretation [of student-centred learning] is a gradual transference of responsibility in learning. [...] My job at induction week is to explain the differences between school life and undergraduate life, and I explain that the responsibility for learning is theirs; [...] it will be increasingly transferred towards them. [...] In second year we ask them to deepen their understanding of learning and the ultimate aim of our learning and teaching strategy is that they are able to learn for themselves, [...] so in the first year we give them lectures, we teach them stuff, we give them formative exercises to learn things and we give a formative assignment, tell them what it is they have to do exactly, frame it, give them specifics for the things they have to learn, tell them how it's going to be assessed. [...] In the second year we give them a bit more freedom within the framework to extend beyond what is taught, and in the final year they are given a framework in which to propose their own contract of learning.

Robert's first thoughts

Student-centred learning is evident in the delivery of skills teaching in so far as individual students after an initial wide exposure are able to make judgements about how they wish to develop their skill base [...]. [The] delivery of skills and technical aspects of the subject are supported by technical demonstrators and academic staff, through group teaching [...] as well as one to one skills teaching. [...] Through this broad range of strategies it is clear that an individual student may negotiate their own pathway. [...] Projects [...] place the student firmly in the centre of their learning experience [and] assist the individual to realise their creative ambition.

Mary's first thoughts

Student-centred learning is a more discursive rather than didactic form of teaching. [...] It [...] puts students at the centre of their learning, it allows them to take responsibility for his/her actions, and have a more engaged rather than passive role. [...] When delivered effectively it enables each individual student to reach their full potential by [academic staff] understanding their needs and adapting the context to best facilitate learning. [...] From the outset students need to be very aware of their creative intentions, and make choices which may place them on very divergent paths to that of their peers. [For academic staff] it is necessary to observe students closely and form a good understanding of both their needs and potential. [...] Student-centred learning is about giving the student autonomy of their learning in a stimulating environment; it discourages dependence but offers tailored guidance and support.

These three extracts, though with some similarities also present some differences in interpretation, and through the following discussion these will be teased out in the context of the remaining data and the literature.

Transmission

The first theme to consider with respect to the data is the extent to which staff have moved away from commodified ideas of knowledge and transmission models of teaching. This, as suggested in the literature review, is the starting point for many when talking about student-centred learning (e.g. Hirumi, 2002; Di Napoli, 2004; University of Bath, n.d.; Brandes & Ginnis, 1986). As many writing from an art and design perspective suggest (e.g. Davies, 1997; Houghton, 2007) transmission is possibly less likely in a studio environment, but as can be seen above, there still appears to be a degree of commodified knowledge transmitted to students especially in the first year. Steve's description of first year in which the lecturers "tell them what it is they have to do exactly" and "give them the specifics for the things they have to learn" would seem to indicate an idea of knowledge as packaged and unequivocal at this

stage (Steve's first thoughts). However, there does appear to be a consciousness of moving on from this within most of the transcripts, and for some this was more explicit than others. Mary talked of her own experience of learning in art and design as being much more aligned with an apprenticeship model, where students learnt by the expert's side, and mimicked to a large extent the art work that the expert produced. She was very conscious of trying not to do the same (Mary's interview).

Deb also discussed this (Deb's interview). She talked of the struggle that students experience having come from a skills-based school education where they are primed as makers, to higher education where they are expected to move into the different mindset of a designer. This transition, quite apart from moving from what perhaps might be seen as a transmission mimicry environment in school, also has elements of dissonance that can be disorientating or stimulating for students. Further examples of dissonance will be discussed later in this chapter.

Responding to students' needs

Responding to students' needs was suggested by several participants as indicative of a student-centred environment. As will be noted from the discussion of students' needs in the introduction to the literature review, there are differing interpretations of what this means, and the data is as disparate in meaning. For many teachers, responding to students' needs may well be at the heart of their understanding of student-centred learning. However, I would like to illustrate that, like student-centred learning, this too can be meaningless without qualification.

The following table (Table 6) teases out what was meant by needs when mentioned by research participants, and the context within which they were voiced. Not all respondents talked in terms of needs, some talked about needs unsolicited and were then prompted if necessary to expand on their understanding of needs. Others talked about needs when responding to one of the prompts used in the interview (Appendix 3).

For students	**For staff**	**Focus of 'needs'**
Students need to be metacognitive (to reach their potential)	Staff need to be mindful of learning styles to encourage students to be metacognitive	Metacognition
Students don't know themselves as learners	The learning process enables this (or the compulsion to follow a process enables this) though it may still not be explicitly understood	Metacognition
Students don't know what they need to know (in terms of content)	Staff need to design an appropriate curriculum	Curriculum
Students need a broad curriculum to enable a range of career paths	Staff need to design an appropriate curriculum	Curriculum
Students have a need to learn the subject	Staff need to know if students have learnt the subject and align their content if not	Curriculum
Students need to be enabled to follow their own (creative) process	Staff need to provide the appropriate variety in resource	Resource

Table 6: Responses made within first thoughts or interviews re 'responding to students' needs'.

Mary, in her first thoughts presented in the extract above, sees the teacher's role as understanding and responding to students' needs for the purpose of enabling them to

reach their potential. When asked to respond to this in the interview, she emphasised perhaps to greater extent what students can understand about themselves as learners, about what they are trying to achieve, and having "an objectivity about the whole learning process" (Mary's interview), so the focus was more on the metacognitive skills of the students, and using these to enhance students' potential. However, she did again point out that to enable students to become more metacognitive, staff themselves need to understand learning as a process, and she cited the VARK learning styles typology (Fleming & Mills, 2005) in particular.

Martin didn't feel students knew their own needs, and when pressed, referred specifically to not knowing their metacognitive needs. He saw the learning process, the opportunities, and the expectations through assessment, all leading to students discovering their metacognitive needs though agreed this might not be explicitly understood.

These two interpretations both focusing on metacognition stand in fairly stark contrast, one focused on enhancing aspirations and potential of students, and an individualised response from students, as one would expect from constructivist conceptions, with staff acting as a facilitator. The other is perhaps more dismissive of students, and probably fits the rhetoric of being more teacher-focused, on what the teacher does, and the teacher as expert. Metacognition in particular will be discussed later, but for now I wish to continue with examining ideas around needs.

Josie, like Martin, also felt students didn't know their own needs; for her this referred to curriculum needs rather than metacognitive, what they needed to know in order to gain

the degree. Again, this is very much a teacher-as-expert position, and contrasts with Mary's reference to curriculum design which was focused on enabling students to access a broad range of career paths. So again there is a contrast between a teacher-focused conception and one that is enabling. In a similar vein to Josie, Deb focused on the need to learn the subject, and the responsibilities of staff to gain feedback and re-align the teaching if the requirements of the subject were not being met.

In another section of her transcript Mary talks about needs in yet another context. She states the course is responsive to students' individual needs in that they are able to follow their own pathway through the creative process, and discusses the resources they provide for them to do so, e.g. blogs of others' work and technical demonstrator support. Though the focus has shifted to resource, the emphasis here again is on enabling.

So it is evident that 'responding to students' needs' can be understood in many ways, and when ideas are teased out, many fall into ideas of learning as a transmission process, or at least demonstrate content-driven and/or expert-driven conceptions of learning. This however may indicate how difficult it is to talk about these ideas, and this difficulty is not exclusive to the data in this study. For example, Moore (1999), who was cited in the introduction to the literature review, offers some advice to staff wishing to adopt a student perspective to engagement with a topic. She states that student-centred learning requires a shift from:

> "*I will tell you this and therefore you will learn*
>
> to
>
> *I want to help you in ways which are effective for you and match your needs*
>
> [author's italics]" (Moore, 1999, p 1).

Moore's comments, whilst demonstrating an attempt to move from a transmission mode, nevertheless feel maternalistic to my ear and perhaps still encourage a culture of dependence.

The data appears to indicate that despite the view that art and design is by design student-centred, despite the difficulties in expressing ideas of student needs, there are indications that lecturers are often still thinking of commodified content, and themselves as expert deliverers of this content.

Other ideas however do not, and especially those voiced by Mary, whose underlying ethos appears to start from a different frame of thinking. This perhaps could be considered in relation to Barr and Tagg's (1995) movement from an "instruction paradigm" to a "learning paradigm" (p 1). They point out that much academic development work, though trying to implement an ethos focused on learning rather than teaching, fails because it is piece-meal rather than starting with a change in perspective.

Responsibility for learning

Often student-centred learning was voiced in terms of increased responsibility for learning, and this was especially so when comparing school life to university life, and when talking about progression (e.g. transcripts of Deb, Steve). Students too when asked agreed there was a marked difference from school where learning was much more structured and that progressively they were given "more freedom", and "left more and more on your own but not completely abandoned" (students' focus group); there was general agreement amongst the students and perhaps especially Course A that

they still felt supported. From the lecturers' perspective though, this requires a handing over, a letting go of authority, and it can be seen above that this is not always easy. Cousin (2008) considers changing the focus from a transmission of information to learning from a student perspective as a transformative process; this will be discussed again later in the chapter.

Active engagement

In the literature review I referred to whether *doing* was akin to student-centred learning. If student-centred learning is aligned with constructivism, doing is not in itself a useful learning activity; it could be merely mimicry as perhaps Mary was describing in her first thoughts presented above as an extract. The constructivists, with a focus on cognition, certainly focus on doing, but it is purposeful doing. Purposeful doing involves thinking, reflecting and evaluating. The intention and expectation that students will engage in purposeful doing is reflected in many of the transcripts. Steve (in his first thoughts) implies that students in second and third years are using the (perhaps mimicry) skills they learnt in first year and applying them in a more personal and creative way. The doing is something practical but there is a cognitive element of applying ideas, and considering other peripheral learning that they need to undertake to enable this application.

There are also many examples of active learning which do not involve practical skills but are primarily a cognitive activity. Robert for example, in response to a question about how he engaged students in the development of aesthetic judgments (a learning outcome within the course), said the underlying aims of many learning situations were to provoke students into deciding what they valued or didn't value, and to start making judgments about the aesthetic value of their own work and the work of others (Robert's

transcript). Again, thinking is purposeful (JISC, 2004; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), and individual, and is certainly removed from ideas of commodified knowledge.

So, active engagement was seen by many as fundamental to a student-centred environment, and in Steve's case, that this became progressively more student-centred throughout the degree.

Reflecting and evaluating: self-regulation

As is suggested above, reflecting and evaluating as one engages with an activity is seen as critical to a cognitive constructivist approach and this is supported by the literature (e.g. JISC, 2004; Richardson, 2003; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This is the process through which students engage in internal constructive feedback whilst learning and thus create their own understanding of a subject.

Developing students' ability to reflect was a conscious aim of several academic staff interviewed, and this was done in several ways. In art and design, this often focused on the process of developing ideas from conception to art piece, and for many courses a reflective journal capturing this process was expected, and formed part of the assessment process (transcripts of Melanie and Mary for example). Melanie confirmed that the assessment is not only on outcome, but takes into account the process, and how that has been articulated in the journal.

This process was augmented by other activities, which developed students' abilities to articulate ideas. For example, Mary uses *pecha kucha* (Klein & Dytham, n.d.), a group

activity in which she asked students to bring along 20 images that inspired them. *Pecha kucha* is Japanese for *chit chat* and is a presentation format used particularly in the arts. Mary loads these 20 images onto a continuous 'slide show' and students are given 20 seconds to talk about each one before moving on to the next. This serves several purposes: to build students' confidence talking in front of a group, to encourage students to engage in a critical dialogue with themselves around the themes of their choice, and to see how others articulate their own thoughts, ideas and inspiration.

Melanie also described a resource which gave students the opportunity to objectify the making process. The resource itself addressed the abstract nature of creativity, which Melanie considered was not made explicit in the curriculum up to that point and yet was an integral part of what was considered successful engagement with the curriculum and assessment requirements. Students were not actually taught how to be creative. This, she said, gave the creative process a certain amount of mystique, but in an environment where students are sometimes struggling to find inspiration to take an idea forward, this was not helpful. Melanie used DVD recordings of Masters students talking about the creative process from the beginning of an idea to the execution of the finished piece of work, and then used psychological models of creativity to objectify the creative process. The DVDs have been supplemented by her annotations highlighting for subsequent students the particular device used by the student on the DVD at that particular point in time.

This example could certainly be considered as enabling students the opportunity to be reflective and evaluative of the creative process, through providing a tool on which to structure this reflection. Melanie's DVD exposes the internal thinking and strategic decisions of past students, and along with the annotations provides a level of

explicitness which up to now had not been provided. This gives students a vehicle for looking objectively at their work, and for developing an appreciation of creativity not just in the abstract, but as a purposeful process of development through various tools and ways of seeing. Understandably, as long as students engage with the process, this gives them much more ownership of the process; they have a tool with which to engage in constructive feedback with themselves and their work. This Melanie claims, has led to increased autonomy and greater confidence among the student cohort, and this was supported by a comment by a student who stated in response to discussion about the reflective journals "by documenting your creative process you can learn to trust it" (students' focus group).

Dissonance and challenge

At the same time, Melanie in the example above saw this resource as enabling students to "step outside their comfort zone" (Melanie's transcript), albeit of their own volition. There were however many examples of deliberate extension and provocation of students by teaching staff as well, and this notion of creating dissonance is evident in many writings on constructivism (e.g. von Glasersfeld, 1990; Baviskar *et al.*, 2009; Poerksen, 2004; Martin, 2006). Melanie talked about a seminar that Mary runs, where students are challenged to respond to the question 'What is contemporary art?' and then asked to place themselves within this milieu of understanding (Melanie's transcript). As noted in the discussion of dissonance earlier, deliberate provocation can be very challenging but if done sensitively, can be very expansive in terms of students developing an understanding of the subject area, developing their own judgment, and developing their critique of their own work. Melanie said the session at the time could get very heated, but students felt very stimulated by it and it provoked considerable debate for some time afterwards. Observations of this process and the subsequent discussion might be an interesting avenue for further research.

As stated in the literature review, constructivism is based on the premise of judging new material against previous knowledge, and then to discard or reshape old understandings in light of this knowledge. Dissonance is seen by many as an impetus for learning as cited above, and without which learners are not stimulated to engage actively, metacognitively, and in a self-regulatory way (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004).

Students also talked about the challenges and the realisation that having their work challenged was part of their growth as students. One student remarked:

> "I rely on [the teachers] for reflection really; I trust them to know what they are talking about and [to] throw my work back at me and tell me what's lacking" (students' focus group).

I would like to point out here that she did not mean work was thrown literally, but that the ideas she was expressing were challenged.

Another student said:

> "I did some work over the summer and some people including me had a really tough tutorial where the tutor just wasn't getting your idea and giving you all these points of research that you really didn't want to look at, and at the time ... it was quite a kick in the face ... but now when I look back I realise that they were sort of doing that, and sort of breaking you down so that you sort of think, yeah, I can do better than what I said" (students' focus group).

She went on to describe the increasing maturity of her work through these challenges, and her increasing intellectual engagement with the objects that she is creating.

Metacognition

I have provided some introduction to the idea of metacognition above when discussing responses to students' needs. Metacognition is often implicit or explicit in descriptions of student-centred learning situations (e.g. Cowan, 2006; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Merriam, 2001; Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). Mary's comment expanded from above focuses on this:

> "they need to understand what they are trying to achieve, and have an objectivity about the whole learning process, not just a cog in a machine" (Mary's first thoughts).

Metacognitive ideas focus on learners being given opportunities to consider the process of learning and to strategise their learning. This notion has some overlap (or perhaps is a subset) with self-regulation considered above; Entwistle and Peterson (2004) claim that without metacognition, self-regulation cannot occur. Both involve internal dialogue, but perhaps strategising is more explicit in the conception of metacognition.

As suggested above, some academic staff try to make the learning process, in this case the creative process more explicit. Mary, in talking about this states:

> "sometimes when they are involved in a creative art, they move into a very different state of thinking, you know, and they might go into that almost transcendental flow state, and sometimes there is a fierce romanticism about the act of creating, and they feel that if they question it or challenge it, the magic will disappear" (Mary's interview).

Here, quite apart from making the process more explicit, is a questioning of the process itself, a meta-level engagement which she then uses to encourage students to

determine for example, the circumstances in which they are most creative, the intentions of their work, and their relative strengths as designer or maker. These strategies were echoed by others interviewed (e.g. Melanie, Robert), and would appear to support ideas already expressed.

Interacting

Art and design learning environments, with relatively low staff-student ratios, and the focus on the studio seem to offer enviable opportunities for interaction within the student group and between students and staff. Many of the staff interviewed drew heavily on this interaction and offered it as key to student-centred learning. The *pecha kucha* activity (Mary's interview, described above) was one of many ways in which students are given the opportunity to articulate their ideas, to hear others' thinking and reflections, and to build confidence within the student group. Another example also already described that was explicitly discussed with respect to communication was the developing blogs resource (Melanie's interview); Melanie, envisaging this eventually running from BA to MA and PhD, described it as "a fantastic community of inherited knowledge", so she is explicitly mindful of the cumulative benefits of developing communication platforms within the student group through ongoing experience.

The students too talked about their increasing confidence in communication as a result of *pecha kucha* and other activities. One, talking about *pecha kucha* said:

> "in the first year I hated it ... but by doing it so often you've sort of now developed your own style for doing it and public speaking, and I know now when I am in other situations where I've got to talk to a group, I sort of know

how to go about it ... [it has helped] my confidence and my way of explaining myself" (students' focus group).

There is evidence here that this skill is something that is now hers, she has made it her own, and put her own style on it. Another student described talking about her own art work:

> "it is also important to have to look at [one's art work] from all possible angles, because eventually you're not only going to show [it] but you have to have a conversation [about it] and that conversation has to be able to be on a high intellectual level. You can't just put it down and like, walk off and see what happens to it. You've got to be the person who goes with it" (students' focus group),

and so though students often really disliked the expectation to publicly communicate and to reflect on their work, they also valued the skills and confidence it has given them.

Conclusions

As stated earlier, ideas around student-centred learning appear to reject transmission conceptions of learning. However, the degree to which lecturers appear to have moved away from transmission models does seem to vary, even within the art and design environment. For some, there appears to be a purposeful staging of this process throughout the degree; for others, it seems that they have not made the shift to what is an alternative epistemological and ontological frame. There sometimes appears to be a difference between "espoused theories" and "theories-in-use" (Argyris & Schön, 1996, p 13; Argyris & Schön, n.d. cited in Barr & Tagg, 1995, p 2). Constructivist conceptions however are well represented, and some lecturers, albeit

unaware of the discourse, were very convincing advocates of a constructivist way of thinking, and using this to conceptualise their approach to student-centred learning.

It would seem that thinking of learning in a constructivist frame is itself challenging. The shift to an alternative epistemological perspective was the subject of extensive research with students by Perry (1970 cited in Entwistle & Peterson, 2004) in which he identified what he called a pivotal point between dualist and relativist ideas of knowledge. Entwistle (2008) toyed with the idea that this may be a threshold concept (an idea first described by Meyer & Land, 2006), and at the same time, posited that developing teachers' conceptions of learning from an information transmission to "conceptual change" (p 29) may also be a threshold. Cousin (2008) in the same edition, as stated earlier, discussed student-centredness as a counter to teacher-centredness, and whilst not suggesting this was a threshold, did acknowledge that it required a "symbolic shedding of the self as teacher" (p 268) which some academic staff may find difficult. Blackie *et al.* (2010) have been more explicit in their claim that student-centred teaching (which they see within a constructivist frame) is a threshold concept.

Despite this, if one is to consider the most convincing advocates of a constructivist conception from the data, it would appear that this seems to be a reasonably robust way of thinking about student-centred learning. However, constructivism, with its focus on the cognitive, doesn't take into account affective aspects of learning, and yet, students' emotional engagement with the subject appeared to feature relatively significantly in the data. The literature review also suggested that some writers closely associate student-centred learning with ideas around empowerment and other more holistic conceptions of student-centredness that might include social justice and

emancipation. I would now therefore like to consider the data through another lens, the humanist perspective.

Chapter 6

Findings: humanist perspective

Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter, the findings around student-centred learning will be discussed through a humanist lens, and then these will provide a perspective to reconsider the findings discussed in the previous chapter. As stated at the close of the previous chapter, it is evident from the data that academic staff in art and design consider learning to be something more than just a cognitive function, and so in this chapter I wish to discuss further themes that have emerged from the data, and support (or counter) lecturers' perceptions by data collected from their students.

At this point I would like to remind the reader that I have used "meaning interpretation" to a large extent (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2000, p 207) in my analysis of the data, rather than a reductionist "meaning coding" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2000, p 201) approach. This means that some aspects of the data will be viewed from more than one perspective, for example, through both humanist and socio-cultural lenses. In addition, quotes or parts thereof may be used more than once. This is appropriate; these perspectives are not mutually exclusive and in my view, the analysis is the richer for it.

Recapping on humanism

As stated earlier, and by way of introduction to this chapter, humanist pedagogies, whilst being essentially constructivist, have an added interest in a more holistic conception of the learner, which includes both emotional and cognitive elements.

Humanists also place greater emphasis on empowerment, civic engagement, and emancipatory aspects of learning. It could be argued that without this affective element, conceptions of student-centredness as empowering and enabling learners to be 'stakeholders' in their communities as Rogers and Freiberg discuss (1994, p 8) would not be possible.

The holistic self

The first idea that I'd like to discuss is that of the holistic self. The data indicated that art and design lecturers saw learning in art and design as more than a cognitive function. As is evident in the literature review (e.g. Davies, 1997; Houghton, 2007) there was a view that 'it goes without saying' that learning in art and design contexts would be student-centred because students are creating something. There was a general feeling among the lecturers interviewed from courses with a fine art bias that it is difficult to create (a piece of art work) without an emotional investment or an emotional consequence. The piece of created work is inevitably how the artist sees the world and their place in it, but as well, the artist's state of mind can be very evident. Melanie, for example, stated:

> "even if [the piece of work] is not autobiographical directly, it's about how you perceive the world",

and Josie said:

> "if someone is really troubled, and low self-esteem ... the colours they pick ... the way they use line, the way they use shape, you can see it"

and

> "putting artwork in an exhibition, it's like taking your clothes off in public".

There are several ideas worth exploring here that connect with student-centredness. The first is that there is more visible evidence of students' psychological state of mind compared to studying in some other disciplines such as science or engineering where this would be less visible or even invisible to academic staff. Learning to create at least is more than a cognitive function; it involves emotional involvement and emotional exposure. This is perhaps evidence that learning in the creative industries, and in particular the notion of student-centred learning, is more appropriately considered with respect to humanist pedagogies than constructivist. It is also supported by the data from academic staff many of whom stated that managing the emotions of students took up a considerable amount of their teaching time.

The testimony from students added another dimension to this. Many academic staff had claimed that one aspect they considered integral to student-centred learning was increasing responsibility for learning, and talked about how this was managed from year to year. Students were asked to comment on this: what their and staff's respective responsibilities were, how this responsibility had changed, and generally about the step up from year to year. Because degree classifications across the programmes involved in this research project are based on third year performance (students just had to pass first and second year), this was seen by students as a particular threshold of responsibility and importance. Several third year students talked about their sense of this at the beginning of the year, the word 'daunting' came up more than once, but for many students especially in Course A this was expressed not negatively but with a sense of excitement about the challenge. Barnett (2008 cited in Blackie *et al.*, 2010) claims that uncertainty and risk are inevitable aspects of being a student, and that this needs purposeful consideration by academic staff. The testimony of students who approached the unknown trajectory of third year with excited anticipation and confidence despite the uncertainty appeared to provide evidence of

the preparatory work done by academic staff. It was evident especially within Course A that students had an underlying confidence they would negotiate any forthcoming hurdles despite uncertainty still being evident. Even those who had started the year badly, and/or were still feeling a little overwhelmed at this stage talked warmly of the programme director and others in the teaching team.

There are other examples of students engaging more holistically in an art and design environment. Some academic staff talked about the contrast with *atelier*-type methodologies that they themselves had been exposed to at university, and the wish among one group in particular to move firmly away from this to a more fine art bias (e.g. transcripts of Mary and Robert), and they felt that this was indicative of student-centredness. However at the same time, staff were trying to unravel and take the mystery out of 'creativity' as a construct, to in many ways encourage students to remove the emotive and consider it in a much more cognitive way, so that they then could approach it more strategically (Melanie's transcript). Mary, in talking about creativity in a quote used previously stated:

> "there is a fierce romanticism about the act of creating, and they feel that if they question it or challenge it, the magic will disappear"

and though she wasn't advocating removing the emotive *per se*, she believed in encouraging students to reflect back on their emotional journey in the creation of a piece, with a view to better understand what they intend the viewer to see. There are both constructivist and humanist elements in the above examples. Whilst encouraging students to self-regulate, reflect and approach learning strategically, teachers, in applying what they consider to be a student-centred approach, are also acknowledging the essentially holistic nature of learning in this environment.

Confidence, self-belief, and building of trust

Issues of confidence and self-belief were mentioned numerous times when considering student-centred environments, and staff appeared to both react to students' lack of confidence and self-belief, but also to purposefully build and bolster self-belief and to enable students to positively respond themselves. Mary, for example, talks about the explicit messages she conveys to students of her faith in their ability:

> "I want to push everyone out of their comfort zone so they actually have to come up with new and innovative things ... There is a bit of the placebo effect sometimes, if you make sure that the student knows that they are completely and utterly capable of doing it and you expect it of them, then they will ... Art education is full of criticism, the ability is actually to be able to address that always constructively" (Mary's transcript).

There is a sense here of unequivocal faith and belief in students' ability, which is one of the hallmarks of Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) idea of student-centredness which they call "prizing, acceptance [and] trust" (p 156), and is exemplified by caring without being possessive and controlling, trusting without judging, and accepting students as people with unlimited potential.

However, this does not acknowledge the combination of support and challenge inherent in Mary's statement, and which is also evident in the testimony of some students discussed above. Students feel challenged, but they also feel supported. The notion of cognitive dissonance and ideas of "troublesome knowledge" (Meyer & Land, 2006, p 4) have already been discussed in the literature review. However in terms of action this is perhaps best considered with reference to some of the mentoring literature (e.g. Daloz, 1986 cited in Burgess & Butcher, 1999, and in Butcher, 2002)

where challenge and creating cognitive dissonance are used in conjunction with a supportive and trusting relationship between staff and students.

There is however a fine balance. Butcher (2002) has suggested that challenge without support causes students to lose interest, and this was perhaps expressed by one student in Course B:

> "actually I feel less encouraged this year than previously; I can't wait until this year is over and done, ... it is stressful, to try to deliver the work, cos we can only see people once a week, and so I find the pressure too much to be honest" (students' focus group).

On the other hand, Butcher (2002) sees support without challenge as unhelpful with mentors then becoming more akin to counsellors. This perhaps is the point of departure from Rogers and Freiberg (1994) who stress the support, but the discourse otherwise feels more self-exploratory and self-affirming rather than challenging.

Mary gave other examples of the support she offered; not only building self-belief and confidence through trusting, she also facilitates activities to counter set-backs students may have. One approach that she uses was giving students:

> "wild cards, when you know they've made a mistake and you know they're going to spend too much time looking backwards at it".

She might for example surprise the students by suddenly changing plans for the day:

> "what you find is that it's the ones who may have been struggling suddenly see this as a bit of a second chance, and they might begin to shine, on something quite small, and something quite flippant, and then you've got a way in,

because they're feeling a bit more confident, and then you can say ok, well what worked here that you can bring back into this?"

There is a real commitment here to finding pathways for all students to excel, and to providing opportunities for students to overcome emotional turmoil in a dignified way.

There were also other essentially organisational aspects that staff referred to which encouraged students' confidence. Melanie talked of the teaching prior to "the revolution" as she called it where there was an attitude that the more teaching (as in tutorials) the better. Tutorials have now been minimised in favour of discussion seminars where students are encouraged to roll ideas around together. This she claims has encouraged a more independent culture and states students "feel like they are being treated like adults" (Melanie's transcript).

Building trust featured often in the transcripts. Sometimes this was evident in how relationships between teacher and students were developed, for example, Mary takes students to the south of France for a residential:

> "that makes a huge difference, you know, even in the learning journal ... [it] was about what France did for them, and about me being there and therefore they know me now as a person, and they feel they can communicate"

and so students are able to see teaching staff as real people. Trust is developed, and students feel supported as they traverse their learning. Others referred to how trust was built within the student group itself. Melanie talked about activities where students draw with their eyes closed to try to create a level playing field where over- and under-confidence are less apparent, and to develop a supportive environment in the studio. These opportunities to expose oneself, with all the frailties that we all have, link back to

Rogers and Freiberg (1994) and their idea of "realness" (p 153) on the part of the facilitator, of being oneself.

To summarise so far, there seems to be considerable evidence that building trust, instilling self-belief, raising confidence and generally providing a more holistic approach to teaching are treated as reasonably critical to learning in this environment. It is debatable how relevant this is to other disciplines; however, the student testimony would appear to indicate the synergistic effect of being valued, and seen as having significant potential.

Empowerment

Ideas of ownership, the individual journey, and empowerment featured often in conversations with academic staff. Melanie talked of students "finding a voice" through their studio practice, and Mary also emphasised the individual journey students participate in through the course of the programme. Mary talked of seminar groups where she posed a question like 'what do you want to be when you grow up?' and so encouraged students to consider their future career. She then grouped students with similar aspirations, building what she called "tribes" and so consciously tapping into their motivations. She also encouraged students to consciously consider the obstacles to their learning, and set about demonstrating how permeable these obstacles are:

> "you ... pitch everything as if they are doing this fantastic artists in residency and there is no, there is nothing they can't do" (Mary's transcript).

All these activities create a culture of empowerment, of enabling students to make purposeful decisions about their own practice. This empowerment and the

transformatory nature of it are captured in Daloz' statement about the benefits of good mentoring:

> "yet most of us spend the better part of our lives trying to assure ourselves that our tales are already told, even if not yet lived, and that they have a happy ending. The discovery that this might not be so can, in itself, lead to profound transformation" (Daloz, 1999, p 28).

Melanie also referred to the empowering qualities of the programme director, and how the department "is so alive with potential and possibility" since her appointment. She referred to it in superlative terms as a "revolution" as noted before that has impacted on both staff and students alike. At the same time, Robert talked about the subsequent sense of individual ownership from the learner's point of view:

> [what] I've always felt so passionately about ... is people's sense of ownership of their practice when they leave, that it's not to do with the institution, it's to do with them and their work ... their intellectual and skills-based activity isn't something that's anchored within the institution" (Robert's transcript).

This notion that students don't take an institutional 'mark' with them is echoed in several statements in the transcripts, and has been referred to previously with respect to *atelier* methods of teaching. Staff saw this ownership as key to student-centredness, that students were not influenced by the work of those who had taught them. They very much worked towards students becoming artists in their own right, and the group consciously tried to maintain a culture of professional modesty amongst themselves and build a sense of all working together within the programme:

> "we don't have enormous egos in the department ... we try to maintain that nobody's ego eclipses the ... students' experience" (Robert's interview).

Again Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) idea of a genuine and empowering relationship with students is evident.

It is worth thinking about the down side of empowerment here, or perhaps, like student-centred learning, how the term 'empowerment' has been manipulated. The humanists focus on a partnership between teacher and learner; the relationship is genuine, equal and mutually respectful. However empowerment and perhaps also 'responsibility for learning' can both be used to absolve any responsibility of the teacher or institution for student learning. This falls back on transmission ideas of 'I teach' and 'you learn'. Barr and Tagg (1995) emphasise "powerful learning environments" (p 3) as a vehicle for both teacher and learner to take respective responsibility for this empowerment. I sense the learning environment especially around Mary and Robert seems to have these elements, and this appears to be supported by the students' testimony discussed in this and the previous chapter.

Identity

In the literature review, I have drawn a distinction between identity from humanist and socio-cultural perspectives. Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) humanist focus is largely inward looking, and focused on individual empowerment and through being comfortable in one's own skin. This is central to their idea of student-centredness. However, there is acknowledgment of the role of others, and of experiences in this personal growth as in the quote used in the literature review:

> "the self and personality would emerge from experience rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit a preconceived self-structure" (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, p 318).

Others talk of empowerment and emancipation (Freire, 1974) and consciousness raising (Mezirow, 1990a, 1990b, 2009), but again they primarily fall into self-actualising conceptions of identity (Maslow, 1970). The socio-culturalists on the other hand see identity, and being and becoming as something much more negotiated between individuals and the community and this will be discussed with respect to the data in the next chapter. To differentiate between these conceptions, I have used Sfard's (1998) metaphors of acquisition and participation, described already in the literature review, as a starting point. The focus then differentiates between that which is constituted through internal reflection and becomes something 'owned' or acquired by the individual (the constructivist/ humanist notion of identity), and that which is constituted through participation (the socio-cultural notion of identity). Another way of thinking about this that has been useful is Wenger's (1998) notion of the "unit of analysis" (p 146). He distinguishes between a dichotomous way of thinking about identity, where the individual is considered separate from the community, and so one could conceivably consider identity from an individual standpoint. This is essentially how Rogers and Freiberg (1994), Freire (1974) and Mezirow (2009) are seeing identity, because though there is some acknowledgment of the role of experience or community in shaping identity, they essentially see it as something integral to an individual.

Wenger though sees this quite differently; he only sees identity as mutually constituted: "we cannot become human by ourselves" (p 146). I will address these interpretations in the next chapter. Here though, I wish to focus on the views of lecturers where they consider identity to be largely an individual acquisition.

In response to a question about how student-centredness came into play in the delivery of a learning outcome focusing on building awareness of the political and cultural

significance impacting on art work, Melanie talked at length about identity. She sees identity as something that is formed outside of one's control through one's upbringing, and the values of the social community in which students have been members to date, and she encourages students during a seminar session to reflect on themselves, these influences and how they have shaped their persona. Melanie's take on identity has parallels with Rogerian ideas (with Freiberg, 1994) and perhaps even more specifically with Mezirow (2009) who specifically focuses on consciousness raising. Melanie is using this activity, not specifically to enhance students' facility to develop themselves, but primarily as an introduction to the consideration of artwork and *its* contextual setting. However, it perhaps also serves the purpose of heightening awareness and providing a base upon which such development might take place.

Later in the transcript, there is confirmation that she sees identity as something students can purposefully wrestle with, and sees the development of their creative work as linked with this, and perhaps a manifestation and expression of this development. Again, this indicates a humanist perspective on identity in the statement:

> "that's where ownership comes from, you find your voice, your independence, cos you are pulling upon these various things, you're driving it, you're pushing it in a very particular manner in the development of your work and in the development of your style of work. That's what happens on the BA through these processes, gradually that voice, that sense of I and ownership appears" (Melanie's transcript).

However, there is also a sense that as a teacher she feels that she cannot guide this creative process as well as she would like, and implies that this is because it is difficult to sense the student's personal development in terms of identity. This perhaps highlights the play between what one as a teacher can control and indeed would want

to control, and also what a teacher can know in terms of students' identity, rather than a focus on experiences that enable students to grow. This realisation is perhaps what prompted her to develop the DVD discussed previously in which creativity is treated as an objective phenomenon.

Mary too sees identity in humanist terms. The activity described above (with respect to empowerment) where students talk about their future aspirations (and she uses the idea of tribes to encourage reflection on their and others' ideas) focuses on the individual journey. She consciously engages students in exercises in what she calls "cathartic self-revelations" (Mary's first thoughts) in which student autonomy is developed. These self-revelatory exercises were discussed further in the interview and expanding on the quote used earlier in the chapter Mary stated:

> ""you ... pitch everything as if they are doing this fantastic artists in residency and there is no, there is nothing they can't do, because what comes out of this huge, the big cathartic self-revelation that they find is that the biggest barrier to creativity is themselves, and that is where it starts becoming quite interesting, because then they start addressing themselves as opposed to addressing the environmental factors around them",

so whilst this can be viewed in terms of empowerment, the self-revelatory aspects fit very comfortably with humanist ideas of identity too; the individual is the focus rather than the community itself.

Humanist ideas are also expressed by Robert in the quote already cited above and the key point noted here:

"people's sense of ownership of their practice ... it's not to do with the institution",

so there's a sense that students take away something, their identity is theirs, there is no sense of negotiating this identity with others.

Josie too sees identity in dualist terms:

> "they've got their private thoughts in [their sketchbook], you know, their attempts to make representation of their world in there, interpreted through their body in the way they make a mark" (Josie's interview).

There is a sense here of a separation between self and society; one's interpretation is one's own, and oneself then represents to others. Again the unit of analysis is focused on self, their sense of the world, even though this sense may emerge from engagement with the world.

Conclusions

It is evident that learning in an art and design context is more than a cognitive function and that the humanist lens has provided significant enlightenment to student-centred learning. Themes which appeared significant to lecturers' teaching such as seeing the student holistically, building self-confidence, empowerment, and the issues around identity have provided a significant broadening of perspective on student-centredness. Whilst accepting that the art and design environment possibly makes these themes more apparent, the data and the feedback from the students' focus groups indicates that being seen as a whole person adds to students' motivation and engagement.

In the next chapter I will turn to the third lens of perspective, that of the socio-culturalists.

Chapter 7

Findings: socio-cultural perspective

Introduction to the chapter

As stated in the literature review, socio-cultural perspectives focus on learning as a co-construction between individuals and others in their environment in a constantly evolving, inseparable process. The learning environment encompasses social, cultural and historic dimensions that have shaped and continue to shape the community of practice within which learning is happening (Wenger, 1998).

Ideas around student-centredness often encompass ideas of identity and of being or becoming, and it was suggested in Chapter 2 that these may be more readily examined through a socio-cultural lens. Perceptions of student-centredness discussed in the last (humanist) findings chapter focused on teachers' attempts to enhance students' recognition of themselves as self-determining, empowered individuals, and introduced ideas about relative positioning with respect to others. However ideas of student-centredness that are expanded to include students' sense of immersion and inclusion (or corresponding exclusion) within a particular community of practice (Wenger, 1998) fit more comfortably within a socio-cultural perspective. This would include attempts to develop students' understanding of being and becoming a professional, and would encompass ideas around employability. Though specific attention to the diversity of students through widening access policies is outside the scope of this study, this idea of inclusion/exclusion is also pertinent to that debate, as discussed briefly in the introductory chapter. It is through this lens that I would now like to consider the interview data.

Community

One of the central ideas of socio-cultural perspectives is the community of practice, a term coined by Wenger (1998) which has been widely discussed in pedagogic terms (e.g. Wenger, 1998; Rogoff, 1995; Wertsch *et al.*, 1995). A university is of course a community, but it is not of itself necessarily representative of the community of practice for which courses are preparing their students. How far university courses overlap or reach out to a particular community may be determined by the discipline itself, course policy, research or professional interest of staff, and staff motivation. For some courses the community is very disparate, others more obvious and defined.

Because ideas around being and becoming were often voiced with respect to student-centredness, the visibility of the community and thus the accessibility for students was of interest to me in this research project. The courses targeted demonstrated a commitment to a community of practice despite the respective communities being somewhat various in their cultural norms. So how visible is the community? And how is access to the community accommodated and negotiated? In Course A in particular, where this was raised frequently there was a strong sense from talking to the academic staff that they belong to a wider discipline-based (and perhaps arts in general) community beyond the university. Certainly they know personally (and are known by) many successful artists in their field and have invited them into the university to speak to students (transcripts of Robert, Mary). Some staff are successful artists themselves and have exhibited widely. They are actively involved in applying for research bids, competitions and exhibitions, and encourage students, especially in third year to do the same. Students too when interviewed stated this in somewhat awestruck tones, but also noted the enthusiastic encouragement from staff for them to participate in this

process as they progressed through their third year. Staff actively encourage and facilitate visits to galleries, exhibitions and events for all levels of students, and encourage students to engage with other artists there. It is here that students often become aware of the connectedness of the discipline community including staff, and begin to feel part of the community. In Course A in particular, there was a strong sense that students felt supported in their movement towards the professional community; one student compared herself to others in similar courses at other universities where perhaps this support was less explicit or non-existent (students' focus group).

Central to Wenger's (1998) idea of the community of practice is the sense of negotiation between individuals and the community itself through participation, generally through dialogue, but also through other means of expression, and it is the community as noted above, that gives students a sense of 'being an artist', rather than being an art student. There is evidence that this is deeply embedded into the course structure by the teaching staff. For example, Mary uses a range of teaching techniques to encourage students to consider who they are, what their strengths are, and where they want to be. As already described, she engages first years in an activity where they are asked about their aspirations when they leave university. She goes through the group until "we find a duplication and then we kind of make tribes" (Mary's transcript), and students start recognising where their interests and/or strengths lie and so can begin to shape their professional practice. In the last chapter I discussed this with respect to empowerment, but students at this stage are also getting a sense of the parameters of these communities: the community of designers, or the community of artisans responding to commissions for example. Through this dialogue, ongoing experimentation with the craft, feedback, and exposure to the arts environment, they are testing themselves and negotiating a space on the periphery of the community. Students are in what Vygotsky calls the "zone of proximal development" (Rogoff, 1999,

p 73) as described in the literature review, the edges of the community of practice within which being and becoming is encapsulated. Access to these communities and the cultures within is relevant because it colours what being and becoming is. Becoming integrated into a community involves participation, negotiation, and the engagement in the relevant discourse.

In Course B, Deb talked about changing the focus of students' thinking from makers (which is the skill most have come with from school) to designers, and the difficulties some students had in moving to this different conceptual space. This can perhaps be thought of in constructivist terms as discussed already, but there is also a socio-cultural element here as students become aware of the alternative discourse of being a designer, and start to think about what it is to *be* a designer. She was conscious of engaging students in the language that is appropriate to being a designer, purposefully using words they are not familiar with and encouraging them to find out what they mean and to start using them too. So though contrived at this stage (and perhaps it could be argued that this is the mimicry stage of overcoming a threshold concept (Meyer & Land, 2006), this could also be seen as the beginnings of understanding of what the community of practice of designers entails.

Part of becoming engaged in a community and being accepted is the engagement with the physical and linguistic tools and artefacts of the group in question. For each discipline within art and design, this includes knowing and becoming used to the language of the discipline, and demonstrating proficiency through the work itself. In Course A it is evident that staff provide continual opportunities for students to discuss their work both from a technical point of view, but also to articulate the message they are trying to convey. The department tries to provide authenticity in terms of

environment; students have access to all the tools of the trade, and are able to participate in the studio with few limitations. Consider the following quote from Mary:

> "you go well what's stopping you, and they go ..., and there's nothing, cos for every excuse, we go, well you could have the [equipment] tomorrow, or whatever, the [equipment] is there, the library's there, the space is there, the heating".

There appears to be an attempt at unfettered provision of facilities the staff try to provide for students, so access to being and becoming is facilitated purposefully. Given the emphasis on student-centred learning as encompassing the notion of identity, and one's place in a community, these issues of access are relevant.

At the same time, unfettered access enables students to also bridge those boundaries. Melanie, as noted in the previous chapter, expressed considerable support for the programme director and the culture she created within the teaching team. She went on to describe the dynamic nature of the community, and a sense that the boundaries are more permeable than previously. She states for example:

> "we have students coming with particular skills ...we have [name] ... who is helping me put together the blogs for the students, and I don't think that knowledge would have been so in depth and active before".

Though not explicitly stated, there is a sense that staff are seeing students as greater than their art skills, and are bringing them into their community and enabling them to work alongside them as peers.

Another critical aspect of communities of practice is the generative nature, not only for newcomers to the practice, but the influence of newcomers to the community itself

(Wenger, 1998). This was less obvious from the interviews with staff, perhaps because it is beyond what staff can enable. Teachers can as demonstrated above, enhance access to the community, but generating change in that community is largely reliant on the newcomer. Given that the purposes of this research was to examine how academic staff are doing this enabling, it is difficult to judge without more detailed interviews with students how successful this was, and perhaps could be the focus of further research at a later date. However, it is possibly to be expected that if access is being enabled that students are shaping and being shaped by the wider community. Certainly one would expect that where access was denied, community influence would be more limited. This 'shaping' is also explicitly stated as a desired outcome of the course, that students will challenge the *status quo*, and produce work that will cause staff to consider something differently. There are some examples of this happening. Mary stated that because students like staff have access to all the latest journals it is often the case that they may be the first within the student-staff group to try a new technique and thus shape understandings of the community within the university environment and perhaps further afield (Mary's transcript). Encouraging students to enter competitions in the open market also enables their work to influence and change the wider community, and certainly staff provide examples of past students who have done just that (transcript of students' focus group). If one considers being and becoming encompasses a mutual reshaping of the community of practice through participation, then enabling students to participate in this way is to be noted.

Creating successful art objects is itself an engagement with a community as there needs to be a discourse between maker and viewer for an art piece to be considered successful. There is evidence from teachers that students are strongly encouraged to come to terms with and verbally articulate the meaning behind their work. This is practised repeatedly throughout the course, through group activities, in the studio, and

privately through students' reflective journals (transcripts of Mary, Melanie, Deb). This not only gives them greater confidence at public speaking, it also forces them to draw connections between objects, to see connections that others have drawn, and others' ideas. Though for example utilitarian pieces may be marketable, the discourse is relatively unsophisticated, and in a course that leans towards the fine art spectrum rather than craft, teachers encourage students not by giving them direction, but by challenge through 'what if' questioning thus opening doors to other options. This is confirmed by a student who said she always made humorous pieces but was prompted to develop these through staff asking questions such as:

> "[what would this look like] if it was an installation piece, or a performance piece?" (students' focus group).

So, students become increasingly skilled at articulating ideas within the local context. The outcome of these activities though extends beyond this. Students are encouraged to consider their work in the wider context of the discipline and art in general. They are contemplating their place within the history of art, the cultural norms which have influenced art through the ages, and the relevant issues of contemporary art and where they fit into this. The discipline is itself an expression of historical, cultural and social norms and issues of the day. These ideas are evident in socio-cultural perspectives, and some staff encourage students to see their work as an ongoing dialogue, not only the contemporary dialogue with viewers of their work, but also a dialogue across the historical divide as ideas are re-interpreted over and over again. Re-interpretation of ideas has of course been done by many artists over the centuries. An interesting comment was made by Alex:

"and it's interesting from a part-time perspective that they themselves again, what [they] contain or hold on to, is the value of that studio space, that they are still visible though they are not present".

Though he was referring to the lack of isolation for part-time students primarily, there is an interesting observation here in the following quote: "that they are still visible though they are not present". This implies that he sees an ongoing and situated interaction occurring that is shaping those around the absent student through the artefacts they have left behind. If one considers being and becoming in socio-cultural terms, cultural artefacts are the interface or tools through which engagement with and development of the relevant discourse are taking place.

At the same time, their work is also impacting on the community, first locally in the studio, but then perhaps much more widely through competitions and exhibitions and may become influential and included into the artefactual fabric of the wider community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Melanie talked about the online blog she was planning so students could document the development of their work. She envisaged that eventually this could be viewed by other students from undergraduate through to doctorate. This could be viewed in constructivist terms, but like the *pecha kucha* example (Mary's transcript), it can also be viewed in socio-cultural terms and what Melanie described as "a fantastic community of inherited knowledge" (Melanie's transcript), where like the example in the above paragraph the artefacts become the vehicle through which ongoing discourse takes place.

Power

Another central idea of communities of practice and access thereto is the idea of power (Wenger, 1998). Again this is relevant if we are to consider being and becoming associated with student-centredness. As stated above, in the literature review I discussed interpretations of Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" (Rogoff, 1999, p 73) and its interpretation in both social constructivist and socio-cultural perspectives. Here, in looking at student-centred learning through the socio-cultural lens, the zone is central to understanding access to the community as described above, but also issues of power. Integration into the community involves negotiating the social and cultural milieu that epitomises the community and through doing so shaping that community. The negotiation itself as described above remains situated in socio-cultural interpretations, and thus heavily dependent on others in the community itself, and how and if access will be given and maintained. There is inevitably a power differential, and how this is managed is critical. If the power differential is too great, students remain marginalised on the periphery. There were several references to this in the interview transcripts. As cited earlier, Mary talked about the residential in France where boundaries were broken down and students got to know her personally. Perhaps more appropriately considered from a humanist perspective, this also perhaps indicates the conscious enabling and breaking down of this power differential so students start to feel more connected with the wider community. She invited them into her world.

Mary's world is also her own practice, and she like others in the department overlaps her professional life as an artist with her professional life as a teacher. She often works on her own projects within the studio in the weekend and so students see her struggling and making mistakes too. The boundaries between fellow artist and teacher become murkier. This was confirmed by students. When asked how they viewed the staff: as teachers, mentors, or fellow artists, the responses for this group were either

mentors, or mentors/fellow artists. It prompted the following comment from one student:

> "I was in the classroom the other day with [a staff member] and she was in there [making an art work] and it just sort of, you feel like you're getting ready for that world that they're in, which is quite nice and it's quite daunting that in a couple of years, next year maybe, we could be exhibiting work next to them" (students' focus group).

Robert's transcript also indicated a conscious effort to minimise power. In a quote already used, he provides an insight into how staff see themselves within the community of practice:

> "we don't have any enormous egos in the department ... we try to maintain that nobody's ego eclipses the ... students' experience" (Robert's interview),

and there was no indication from students in this course that they felt access was denied.

Some staff felt being friendly and relaxed reduced the power differential. Steve talked about deliberately dressing down, and about sitting on tables in the studio and chatting in a relaxed manner to try to engender an informal and more power-neutral environment, and again students confirmed this approachability especially in the third year (students' focus group).

Identity, being and becoming

Key to Wenger's (1998) ideas is the defining of identity and what it might mean. As stated in the previous chapter, I have drawn a distinction between humanist and socio-culturalist ideas of identity respectively in the literature review. As stated, the humanists have a focus on personal growth aspects, and identity is viewed from the perspective of self. The socio-culturalists such as Wenger (1998) in contrast focus on a notion of identity that encompasses both community and individual, and identity as mutually constructed through participation in a community of practice. Here he sees the "unit of analysis" (p 146) as neither self nor the community, and:

> "a reified, physiologically based notion of individuality misses the interconnectedness of identity" (p 146).

Many examples were cited in the last chapter which would indicate that lecturers had a predominantly humanist idea of identity, that students, though interacting in a community within and outside the university that might be influential, ultimately 'own' their identity. This idea is anathema to Wenger; the point he is trying to make is that the decisions students for example make cannot be viewed just in terms of individual choice, that they are exposed to ideas but then decide a particular pathway. Nor can they be seen as wholly adapting to a particular culture, an idea which might be seen paralleled in Mary's discussion of the *atelier* method (Chapter 6). Instead, like other aspects of socio-cultural thought, Wenger sees identity as only able to be conceived through thinking about the "pivot" (p 145) between the individual and community.

Consciousness therefore moves to the interface, and this heightens awareness of the norms of the community itself. Melanie talked about identity often, and as discussed in

the last chapter, her ideas of identity with respect to students are largely humanist and about consciousness raising. There were hints though that her view of art and artists was much more relational with respect to the community, culture and political sphere within which they were working. There was more sense of the pivot and mutual influence. As suggested already, participation in the community is reliant on adoption of the norms of the community, whilst at the same time, influencing these same norms. Perhaps Melanie's lack of acknowledgment of students' impact thus far on the world around them, and the sense that their identity has been wholly shaped by others is indicative of her seeing students, who are predominantly school leavers, as having relatively little power thus far in their lives. Identity, being and becoming are predominantly about membership for Wenger (1998). This raises an interesting question about the age by which one can assert membership to a community of practice, a topic outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, as I have suggested above, the interviews with lecturers revealed their willingness to enable student engagement with respective communities of practice, and I have discussed many examples of this in the previous chapter. However, without further research with the student cohort, it is difficult to gauge the level to which they felt 'members' of that community.

Being and becoming a global citizen

Contemporary drivers in higher education include ideas such as internationalising the curriculum and more collaborative relationships with students. Given this, one wonders whether centredness as a principle is viable in the current higher education climate. For example, as suggested in the introductory chapter, *For our future* (WAG, 2009) appears to indicate that the Welsh Assembly Government wishes to take education to the people, rather than expecting people to come to it, which given the resistant

participation levels, is perhaps not working. This may indicate a change of focus towards education that is more pervasive within the community.

In addition, though Wales' *For our future* (WAG, 2009) seems somewhat Wales-centric, there is a groundswell of ideas about educating for the global citizen within higher education across the UK. Globalisation of the curriculum involves more than enabling a greater number of international students to study in the UK, or providing some international examples in the curriculum. It involves a change of perspective in which students are able to engage with 'cultural others' and other cultural norms without prejudice. This involves engagement with an even broader range of communities of practice, and a focus on the "pivot" (Wenger, 1998, p 145) between self and society, and as discussed above, this is not a person-centric notion. Engagement with cultural others can only happen at the pivot in a mutually enhancing, ongoing and dynamic way, and this enhanced perspective is necessary not only for students, but for staff too. The point though is that this notion is perhaps counter to the centric narrative of student-centredness.

Contemporaneous with globalisation ideas is a growing 'students as partners' movement across the higher education sector evidenced by such projects as the *Graduates for our Future* project in Wales (see Higher Education Academy, 2010). This perhaps is inevitable given how responsive higher education now needs to be, and was mentioned by the Senior Manager interviewed early in the research process (see narrative in Chapter 5). Students as partners has sometimes been suggested as a counter-narrative to the idea of students as consumers (Streeting & Wise, 2009), but could also be seen as a parallel or perhaps alternative discourse to student-centredness. The discourse includes ideas such as students as evaluators, as

participants in university management, as partners in curriculum design and delivery, and in other change roles (Kay *et al.*, 2010), and could be seen as having some parallels with ideas expressed already in this thesis as being student-centred, such as students exercising choice, or more empowering relationships between staff and students. It is unknown at this stage whether the rhetoric of 'students as partners' will be a re-interpretation of student-centred learning, or whether it will effect a new discourse altogether.

Conclusions

In conclusion, being and becoming are often linked with ideas of student-centred learning through ideas of employability, purposeful engagement with a prospective work community, and ongoing career development. There are also links with the notion of cultural capital, and the ability of students from non-traditional backgrounds to negotiate the discourse of higher education and beyond. Of the three perspectives, the socio-cultural most explicitly addresses this through the notion of engagement with a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

It is evident that on the whole, lecturers interviewed were mindful of the significance of a wider arts community of practice, and purposefully enabled access to those communities. It was evident too that socio-cultural perspectives permeated some lecturers' sense of the discipline, and their own and their students place in it. On the whole too, students appeared to feel this enablement; however the extent to which they became enculturated into and members of these communities outside of the university is difficult to judge from the data. Despite enablement, the focus of socio-cultural perspectives is, as discussed with respect to Sfard's (1998) acquisition/ participation

metaphors, knowing *how* to participate in the community, and it is this that enables the becoming aspect of the learner (McCormick, 2008).

What is evident from examination of student-centred learning from a socio-cultural perspective is that the focus moves from the individual to the interface between the student and the community, or more specifically to the interface between the student and his/her practice in that community. There is less centredness evident in this perspective, which perhaps raises the question of where centredness fits in a contemporary idea of higher education.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

Introduction to the chapter

In this final concluding chapter I wish to summarise the research, and draw out and discuss conclusions from this synthesis. In doing so, I will place this within the current context in higher education, and outline how these conclusions have contributed to current thinking about learning and teaching. I will also discuss the challenges and limitations of the research and will make recommendations for both practice and further research.

The research questions

This study addressed the substantive research question:

> What is the range of understanding of student-centred learning of academic staff supporting learning in art and design within the university of the researcher?

and a sub-question which might be addressed was:

> What teaching methodologies are staff using that they consider are student-centred?

Student-centred learning as a concept

Entwistle and Peterson (2004) define a concept as something for which there is a shared understanding with commonly agreed principles, as opposed to a conception, which is an individualised response to a concept. Student-centred learning is often treated as a concept; the pedagogic literature often refers to it as if there is a general understanding, and university learning and teaching strategies often do the same. However this thesis has found that student-centred learning is conceptualised in different ways by different people, from lecturers to theorists.

Prompts for this study

The study has been undertaken within a university in Wales, within a rapidly changing higher education environment. Even as I write there are impending redundancies and further merger talks within the sector in Wales. At the same time, students are facing the prospect of increasing financial debt though this has been delayed for Welsh students for the 2012-13 academic year through subsidies offered by the Welsh Assembly Government (BBC, 2010b). This subsidy in itself gives some insight into a different perspective from the government in Wales which, faced with a lag in socio-economic terms of the Welsh population compared to the rest of the UK, is targeting two themes for the future, those of "social justice and supporting a buoyant economy" (WAG, 2009, p 2) as already discussed. This provides the backdrop for the research.

This thesis was prompted by a snapshot survey within the university within which I work where staff were asked to respond to the question *What do you understand by student-centred learning?* The responses were varied; that is, there were differing conceptions. As an academic developer and programme director of the Higher

Education Academy-accredited post-graduate certificate in the university, this prompted questions as to why this might be the case, the various drivers for instilling ideas within discipline groups, and cultures within disciplines themselves. It was also problematic from the viewpoint of the university itself; assumptions that we all interpret student-centred learning similarly could not be made and this would impact on validation and review of programmes to name one instance.

I decided this warranted further investigation. I wished to explore lecturers' conceptions of student-centred learning and the grounds on which they were based, and the conceptions underlying our learning and teaching strategy documents. I wished to examine conceptions from the literature and find out where the notion of student-centred learning came from historically.

Initial literature review

The initial literature review was influential in determining the approach taken in the study. What was evident was that the notion of student-centred learning emerged from post-modernist challenges to ideas of knowledge. How this unfolded is beyond the realms of this study, but it coincided with ideas around constructivism, the emergence of the civil rights movement, and ideas of greater individual empowerment.

It was evident from this early literature review that student-centred learning is often associated with constructivism itself, or ideas embedded in constructivist thought such as metacognition, reflection and active learning. It is also evident that there are similarly significant but divergent correlations with humanism and notions of empowerment, self-determination and to some extent democracy. It is also often used

in conjunction with discussion of social policy drivers such as widening access, employability and social justice.

Research methodology

This initial review of the literature determined the research methodology. It was evident that there were varying understandings of student-centred learning as stated and so a subjectivist rather than objectivist stance was taken with respect to ontology and epistemology, so that individual nuances could be explored. It followed that an interpretive study would be the most appropriate to tease out conceptions of student-centred learning, drivers for these conceptions, and how these conceptions were enacted in practice. In this thesis therefore I have explored conceptions of student-centred learning, predominantly through interviews with academic staff using a constructivist grounded approach (Charmaz, 2001). These have been contextualised through an interview with one of the senior management team and focus groups with students. Qualitative data collection and analysis methods have been used.

Framing of the study

The initial literature review also prompted the framing of the study. I decided to examine student-centred learning and the data through three lenses, those of constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism. This has shaped the literature review and the examination of relevant university and government documents. It also prompted me, after the first few interviews, to concentrate on lecturers within art and design because this environment offered more opportunities to explore these three lenses more comprehensively. The reasons for this have been outlined but include the reduced likelihood that there would be transmission teaching in this environment, and

early interviews indicated that learning seemed to be more transparent, and that there were more opportunities for feedback to students.

The focus on constructivism

The literature revealed differing emphases across conceptions of student-centred learning. What appeared to be universal though was the rejection of transmission models of teaching, and to a large extent this notion was evident in lecturers' verbalised conceptions of student-centred learning in the interviews conducted for this study. There was often association with constructivism in the literature, and some lecturers interviewed though not necessarily conversant with constructivism *per se*, identified ideas such as recognition of prior knowledge, active engagement, reflection, metacognition, and challenge as ideas that they considered student-centred. For some, these notions also appeared to be evident in their practice.

As stated, transmission models were explicitly rejected by some when talking about student-centred learning, though there were indications that transmission was used purposefully in early years of the degree by others. There were also indications that though some staff might be able to talk about principles of student-centred learning from a constructivist perspective, their descriptions of their teaching appeared to be predominantly and perhaps unknowingly transmission-focused; as was discussed in Chapter 5, there was a difference between what they said and what they did. They had not made the transition in their practice. This move to a constructivist way of seeing with its alternative epistemological and ontological frame of reference may be seen as a threshold concept (Meyer & Land, 2006). This is not stated specifically, but perhaps implied by Cousin (2008). Given the complexity of a constructivist approach, that it is not just a way of teaching, but a way of seeing, I would support this viewpoint. This

highlights further academic development work needed if movement from a transmission style of teaching is to be instigated across the academic cohort and highlights the specificity of a focus on values perhaps rather than teaching methods or even learning theory. This point is expanded further later in the chapter. It also means, given the sometimes difficult and prolonged transition through a threshold concept, that this work needs to be ongoing.

The gap between what staff said and what they did could also be considered in terms of Argyris and Schön's "theories of action" (1996, p 13) in which they draw a distinction between one's "espoused theory" and their "theory-in-use" (1996, p 13; Argyris & Schön, n.d. cited in Barr & Tagg, 1995, p 2). As stated earlier in this thesis, one's espoused theory is that given to justify a particular action, and is often linked to an organisation's policy or regulatory framework. Though research participants' espoused theories were often evident in the transcripts, the origins of these were not fully explored. However, the university learning and teaching strategy did not appear to be a significant driver. One's theory-in-use in contrast, as stated earlier, is the manifestation of one's espoused theory through participation in the practice, and this is also influenced by observation and interaction with others. Integral to both forms of Argyris and Schön's theories of action is again the idea of values, but perhaps what is more evident in their work is the emphasis on exploration of the assumptions made in response to particular values. Again, this would be a useful avenue to explore for further research and academic development work, and could be seen as "double loop learning" (Argyris & Schön, p 21) where values are examined and challenged rather than piece-meal changes to one's practice.

Humanism as an alternative lens

Rogers (with Freiberg, 1994) is often cited as the origin of student-centred learning. His focus and that of other humanists (e.g. Freire, 1974; Mezirow, 1990a, 1990b, 2009) is somewhat more holistic than the constructivists though embeds constructivist ideas. Learning becomes greater than a cognitive activity and includes ideas around personal growth, empowerment and consciousness raising. In fact, Blackie *et al.* (2010) in their review, note that this personal growth and subsequent engagement with civil society are more important factors than the content of the learning itself. Humanist pedagogies have resonance with policy targets in Wales which as stated above emphasise social justice, democracy and social inclusion, though there is little evidence that Wales' education policy has consciously shaped teaching within the research group; this will be noted again later.

There was evidence among the research participants that significant time and effort went into boosting confidence and self-belief of students, and that they felt this was integral to a student-centred environment. It could be argued that this notion is exclusive to the art and design environment, and certainly there are emotional elements to the production of art pieces that are not prevalent in other disciplines. It could also be argued that students' work is more open to public scrutiny because of the studio environment and thus additional support would be necessary. However there were generic features; the lens provided a broader interpretation of student-centred learning which included ideas about valuing and accepting students as individuals, lecturers presenting themselves as 'real people', and building trust between teachers and students. Learning felt much more like a partnership when viewed through this lens, and opened up ideas around a partnership with students. Those who demonstrated the strongest affinity with humanist ideas demonstrated this through their

overall attitudes to students and their learning experience and through the developmental teaching methodologies they adopted.

I have suggested in the findings that real empowerment rather than the rhetoric of empowerment is reliant on this mutual contribution to learning within purposefully designed learning environments, and there is some evidence of this in the transcripts. What is less evident is a complete removal of the object-subject relationship between teacher and learner where learner is teacher and teacher is learner, which MacRury (2007) suggests is necessary for a truly empowering relationship. Nor is it evident from the transcripts how institutional regulations and processes encourage or mitigate against this move.

The lens of socio-culturalism

The consideration of student-centred learning from a socio-cultural perspective provided further insight into student-centredness. Socio-culturalism emphasises learning as a co-construction between learners and the cultural milieu in which they are learning. This milieu is seen to have social, cultural and historic dimensions that shape what becomes a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

This perspective was less evident in the data collected; however it did feature. Ideas around developing a place in a community of practice were often raised, and how students might negotiate their place in this community, and be or become a member of this community was discussed and seen as central to a student-centred approach by many. There were examples cited where academic staff felt they had enabled or assisted students in this engagement. What was less clear was how successful this

was, as without comprehensive data from students this sense of membership is difficult to ascertain. This could perhaps form part of a further study.

Because a community of practice is contingent on negotiation, this lens perhaps places less emphasis on the 'centredness' of student-centred learning, and highlights other discourses at play in the sector, for example that of students as partners.

Reflections on drivers

It is worth pondering how we got to this point. I have already mentioned changing ideas of knowledge as part of post-modernist thinking. Contemporaneously economic drivers have changed the *modus operandi* of universities towards developing students for an employment market, and these same drivers have also changed the positioning of universities to one where they have become a tool of society itself (Barnett, 1994). At the same time, managerialism has crept into university structures including learning and teaching. For example, an audit culture has driven the idea of 'teaching excellence'; however Skelton (2009) points out that the significant funding to support the Centres for Excellence on Teaching and Learning in England for example have had little impact on institutions beyond the immediate recipients. This audit culture has also changed teaching and the student experience. For example, courses are increasingly being broken up into smaller and smaller bite-sized learning episodes, which some commentators (e.g. MacRury, 2007) think breaks up the narrative of the discipline. Of particular note here is how the audit culture has impacted on the scholarship of teaching. Teaching becomes as measured by National Student Satisfaction Survey scores or employment rates of graduates (MacRury, 2007). It is suggested by Fitzmaurice (2010) and I think there is evidence in the review of the pedagogic and grey literature in this study that managerialism has resulted in performative

understandings of teaching excellence in many quarters, and has driven the idea that teaching is a list of competencies.

In the UK literature for example, considerable attention has been given to questionnaire approaches to determining how staff teach, and how students learn, for example, the Approaches to Teaching Inventory (Trigwell & Prosser, 1996, and Prosser & Trigwell, 1998 both cited in Trigwell *et al.*, 1999), the Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs, 1987 cited in Trigwell *et al.*, 1999) and the Course Experience Questionnaire (Ramsden, 1991; also cited in Richardson, 1994; and Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre, n.d.) respectively. All are tools for large scale survey and are comprised of statements to which staff or students respectively respond on a Likert scale; clearly quite different instruments of research than I have adopted. Though they haven't been examined in enough detail for detailed critique, it is useful to consider the underlying premise of these surveys and the relationship with the notion of teaching excellence. The Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI) and Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ) were used together by Trigwell *et al.* (1999), to determine whether staff adopted a "transmission/teacher-focused" or "conceptual change/student-focused" (p 62) approach to teaching and correspondingly whether students adopted a surface or deep approach to learning. The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) is essentially trying to provide a reliable measure of performance of academic staff, but again appears to focus on whether the course is largely transmission or whether it develops cognitive and generic skills in particular. The questionnaires appear in principle to be driven by constructivist thinking and especially the difference between deep and surface learning, but if one takes the CEQ as an example, the statements in the 25 question survey (Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre, n.d.) give no indication of a rounded approach to enhancing the learning experience; there is no indication of opportunities for reflection, or where prior learning was utilised, or

where students felt challenged. Humanist and/or socio-culturalist ideas are not considered or embedded. These typologies which have been given considerable journal space in the UK since the early 1990s have in my view added to the move towards what Fitzmaurice (2010) calls a technicist approach to teaching. Teaching and learning in these questionnaires is reduced to statements, such as those for student response in the CEQ questionnaire (Higher Education Academy Engineering Subject Centre, n.d.): "it is always easy to know the standard of work expected" and "the course developed my problem solving skills" and "the staff put a lot of time into commenting on my work". It could be surmised that this has spawned the statements and slogans approach to student-centred learning often seen within the grey literature such as university websites and the Higher Education Academy Subject Centres especially. I would like to suggest that the critique offered in this thesis illustrates how meaningless this can become in practice.

There is evidence that some of the rhetoric of this competency-based approach to teaching is evident in the testimonies of the academic staff, and also evidence that some staff find moving from a transmission mode to a more student-centred one to be challenging. The evidence from Kember and Wong's (2000) study already discussed also indicates that students' preferences are varied, some preferring (or accepting as necessary) a combination of transmission and non-traditional teaching methods.

There is also however evidence of a strong values-driven approach by some lecturers, and this has influenced to greater or lesser extent those around them, and this could be seen as reflecting the tenor of the empirical studies as brought together in Kember's (1997) meta-analysis. Though not explored in depth, it appears that both government

social policy and the learning and teaching strategy within the university have had less effect than drivers such as an influential programme director.

A contemporary theory of teaching

This research has confirmed that student-centred learning is a slippery concept and often used without consideration of origins or underlying principles. In addition, the underlying principles are themselves various. Applying differing perspectives has provided some quite different insights into how student-centred learning is interpreted and enacted, and to a lesser extent how students perceive the resultant actions.

I would like to suggest that these conclusions about student-centred learning could be applied to many slogans we use in teaching (such as *empowerment* and *responsibility for learning* which have been discussed already), and that we need to take a more critical stance. I would also like to move away from tick-lists of best practice. What appears to be evident from the research data is that some lecturers approach teaching in a very considered way; they are continually reflective of their practice, and have made purposeful developmental changes to their practice over time. They appear to have incorporated knowingly or unknowingly competing and complementary ideas about teaching into their own 'portfolio', so there are aspects of constructivism, humanism and socio-culturalism evident in some testimonies, and incorporated into their ideas of student-centredness.

It was also evident where several members of one team were interviewed that there was a synergy across the team; some of these conceptions were common, but each individual has their own particular angle, which may be influenced by the context or

content of their teaching, or their own underlying values. It appeared evident that the context and content of art and design teaching played a part in how student-centred learning and teaching and learning in general were conceptualised, but also significant was the cohesiveness of this teaching team in particular and the evidence that learning and teaching was discussed regularly. Within the other two courses no such conclusions can be made because fewer staff agreed to be interviewed.

Epistemological and ontological positions and underlying values and beliefs about education and how these influenced lecturers' conceptions of student-centred learning were not explored in depth in this study, though there is a sense of these aspects in the data. This is perhaps one area where I think I would like to do further work, and to build these into a more narrative approach to data analysis and presentation.

My interest in a narrative approach began when analysing the data for this project. As described in the main body of this thesis, I began the analysis process by using methods recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2000), but found myself increasingly drawn to the transcripts and audiotapes as a holistic document. This idea of "meaning interpretation" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p 207) where what is said is interpreted within the wider frame of reference was much more satisfying to me and it felt like a much richer interpretation. I have attempted to provide a limited narrative form through the presentation of the interview with the senior manager and through providing the annotated excerpts of some of the participants' first thoughts.

Not only that but I have in this thesis argued that through the process of "naturalistic generalisation" (Stake, 2000, p 22), readers of the research findings would see aspects

of typicality; they would see aspects of their own teaching situation described, and perhaps as a result view it in a different way. I would like to suggest that we apply this approach more explicitly to academic development *per se*.

For example, Skelton (2009) has suggested encouraging lecturers to develop their own living theory of teaching based in a "personal philosophy of teaching" (p 109). This research has reinforced my support for this idea. As noted above, there was evidence that academic staff combine a range of perspectives of learning into their breadth of provision which could incorporate competing ideas, contextual influences and personal ideology, rather than teaching driven by a technicist approach. An acceptance of a personal but purposeful approach grounded in a particular ideology is to be encouraged and I believe it would stimulate a more critical and reflective approach to ideas such as student-centred learning. We often expect this approach of our students, but perhaps are not applying the same principles to our teaching.

Fitzmaurice (2010) has suggested that we focus too much on teaching strategies and tools, and "context, ideology and values are not discussed" (Fitzmaurice, 2010, p 53). This research perhaps suggests that the messages especially from the grey literature err too much towards strategies and tools. I would agree that developing values or cognisance of existing values are not necessarily central to academic development activities, which are often focused on methods. Though there are some opportunities within the university to discuss broader ideas with others especially for probationary staff, this is not necessarily the case for more established staff. Smith (2011) has suggested that teaching is laden with values and teaching practice is largely making ethical judgments about daily dilemmas we face, and these decisions are influenced by our underlying values. She considers that examination of these values is useful for

one's professional development, but also to inform about the most appropriate approach to a situation faced. I would like to suggest that as academic developers we provide more opportunity for underlying values to be examined and expressed, both by individuals and teams, and use these as a vehicle for change.

As suggested above, I valued the limited opportunity to consider the narrative aspect of the data and would have liked to have developed this further, and will consider this for future research. This notion does however provide a way in which lecturers' living theories of learning and teaching could be evidenced and disseminated. The testimony of one participant in particular (Mary) convinced me that lecturers' personal stories could provide a significant vehicle for discussions about learning and teaching and developmental change across the teaching body. The influence she has had on others as described in their interviews also indicates the values-driven approach within this programme. As stated above, I have attempted to use a narrative approach within this thesis to a limited degree. However I think it has highlighted its usefulness in academic development; I think there is considerable potential to use personal narratives to develop others. As well as that, as stated, I think more explicit opportunities to examine and discuss personal values would be valuable.

There are also other opportunities to explore personal values. Currently the Higher Education Academy is working with HEFCW to develop three pedagogic enhancement strands across Wales, namely students as partners, learning in employment, and learning for employment (Higher Education Academy Wales, 2011), and as part of my role I will be involved in the development of the idea around students as partners. Earlier in the chapter I noted that MacRury (2007) suggests a complete removal of the object-subject relationship between teacher and learner. This is part of a

comprehensive dismissal of the contemporary emphasis on auditing everything, which he considers has negatively impacted on higher education through the creation of bite-sized learning with little thinking time, warped ideas of empowerment and student-centred learning, and restrictive regulatory processes. The Students as Partners initiative may be an ideal opportunity to explore underlying values of individuals, groups and the institution itself, and provide possibly a further development of the idea of student-centred learning.

Ideas for further study

On the whole I was satisfied with the research project and found it hugely satisfying. There have been some aspects however that I might have done differently or used to supplement the approach I used; these have mostly been mentioned already. To summarise here, further research that I have identified that could follow this study include:

- observational studies of student-centred learning in practice, through observing teachers' practice in the learning space and through other communication, but also through observing students engaging with the discipline with teachers and between themselves
- a more specific but comprehensive study of the student cohort with respect to socio-cultural aspects of teaching including engagement and negotiation of a place in the relevant community of practice (Wenger, 1998)
- exploring student-centred learning further by examining teachers' underlying values and beliefs about education
- expanding the methodology to supplement this study or for another to include a narrative approach to data analysis and presentation

- exploring the parallels between the creativity literature and that of student-centred learning.

Reflections on the research process

As stated at the beginning of Chapter 3, personal reflections were intermingled into the methodology chapters as the progression of the research unfolded. I would like to return to these ideas here. As stated, I have undertaken an exploratory study using a grounded constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2001). Interpretivist studies such as this acknowledge the inevitable nature of the researcher being part of the social world they are researching, and the complexities inherent in the research process because of this. This prompted iterative reflection whilst undertaking the research and resulted in both purposeful and evolving decisions made throughout the process. For example, there was some reflection on an appropriate research methodology resulting in the decision to use a constructivist approach. There was also some changes made to the research participant group; staff from art and design were eventually targeted. This decision was purposive because it was evident from the initial interviews that teaching in art and design was more illustrative of the theoretical framework I wished to explore.

More detailed demographic information could have been collected from the research participants, for example, their teaching experience, whether they had undertaken a teaching qualification, and the particular course they were teaching on. This would have provided a further vehicle for analysis of the data. In addition, it would have been profitable in the context of this study to have interviewed more staff, however given the timeframe and decision to restrict to the university within which I work, this was not possible.

The research questions underwent some revision after the pilot study, and the emphasis on particular questions in subsequent interviews evolved as the study progressed. If undertaking this study again, I would shape the first interview prompt (Appendix 3) differently or not use at all. Little was gained from using this prompt.

The selection of the data and decisions about presentation of the data were made whilst undertaking the research. It would have been fruitful to have perhaps decided from the outset to present all the data as narrative, and reflecting on the process now, that is probably the most significant change I would make as a result of this study. This would necessitate a shift in methodological approach and analysis from the outset.

Developments to my own practice

This research project has enabled considerable personal and professional development. I like others, have made assumptions about particular phrases or aspects of pedagogy. This project has developed my criticality, and in particular has broadened by own perspective on student-centred learning.

During the course of my doctoral study, through a greater appreciation of the literature, I have continued to develop the teaching sessions and individual and group academic development work I do. I have used the research undertaken to question others about understandings of student-centred learning and to initiate discussions about different perspectives on student-centredness. This has enhanced the development of both my own and their practice. Humanist and socio-cultural perspectives are much more

explicitly explored alongside constructivism as underlying principles in workshops, though this could be expanded further.

I feel much more confident in my own underlying values and my own 'living theory' of teaching, and also more confident and purposeful in developing my own practice. As a consequence, I feel more able to contextualise ideas, I have more insight into the development of others, and have a more sophisticated approach to this development.

I have also learnt much more about teaching in art and design, an area I was largely unfamiliar with, and I have been impressed by the level of professionalism and commitment of staff within the group.

Specific academic development work that I have identified that could follow this study includes:

- providing more and varied opportunities for the development of academic staff from transmitters of information to constructors of knowledge. Though constructivism underlies the workshops on the post-graduate certificate, given the threshold nature of constructivism, this needs ongoing and explicit attention. For those outside the PgC, there is little explicit development in this regard.
- more explicit examination and discussion of underlying values that impinge on ethical decisions we make as teachers. At present, teaching dilemmas are not discussed in these terms; I think this would be a useful vehicle for discussion, and could be embedded within the PgC. Also, as a university we are accredited by the Higher Education Academy to confer recognition at Standards 1, 2 & 3 of

the UK Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2006) through individual application. This could be more explicitly tied into this process and thus target those outside the PgC.

- more explicitly taking a living theory approach to academic development, and providing personal stories which focus not only on teaching strategies, but the underlying values that drive these. These could be integrated into many of the workshops I conduct and would provide a vehicle for discussion to complement the literature. They could also be used for wider academic development work outside the PgC.

- consider, in conjunction with other staff, how these ideas could be more explicitly integrated into development of staff outside of the PgC. Some vehicles for this could be: partnerships with those providing the technology-based workshops; more integration of underlying principles and values into processes such as validation and periodic review; better integration into the individual application process for UK Professional Standards Framework recognition as suggested above; more integration of continuing professional development into the staff performance and review process; and building partnerships with the Students' Union to better integrate their views into curriculum development work.

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Appendix 1: Prompts used to conduct interviews with academic staff

GENERAL AREA OF QUESTIONING	PROMPTS
LEARNING	
With reference to this learning outcome, how do students learn this?	Use one or two learning outcomes from module that participant teaches
Why did you decide to do it this way? What informed this decision?	
STUDENT CENTRED LEARNING	
You have described student-centred learning as …. (from statement). *How did you come to see SCL as this?*	Statement already solicited via email
How does that relate to …..	Again reference to learning outcomes or other aspect of documentation related to their teaching
What changes have you made to the programme /your teaching recently that you feel make it more student-centred? Why did you make these changes?	
ETHOS OF TEAM	
Do you think that your team shares an ethos as to how/ how much/ to what end students are supported in their learning?	

Do you feel that the programme documentation (learning outcomes, assessment strategies, teaching strategies) reflect your ethos or is it a barrier? In what way? Examples.	
WIDER PERSPECTIVES	
Does the (university) learning and teaching strategy clarify /enhance development work at the team and individual level or hinder?	
What has generally been the driver to develop your own teaching? The documentation for your programme etc	
What have generally been the drivers for development work within the team?	
EMPOWERMENT	
Where do you mostly see yourself with respect to these perspectives of student-centred learning?	Present two different threads of student-centred learning: empowerment led perspective, teacher led perspective as prompt for discussion (Appendix 3)
If your team decided to adopt an empowerment model as described here, how do you think it would go? Do you think it is appropriate for students generally? For your students?	Use questions developed for this purpose (Appendix 4) based on Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) idea of empowerment, and expanded using Whetton *et al.* (2000).
Do you feel that your students have the skills, experience, desire, knowledge to take control or responsibility for their own learning? Examples?	

Do you have any other comments you would like to make at this stage?	

Appendix 2: Prompts used to conduct interview with senior manager

Preparation: e-mail and ask for a definition of student centred learning. **Inform:** **I will be asking questions about internal and external drivers for change in higher education and also questions about the learning and teaching strategy.** **I am investigating student centred learning and am planning to interview academic staff. I want to talk to her to frame their responses within the learning and teaching strategy**.
If you had to name three key external drivers for change in higher education, what would they be?
Do you feel that there is consistency between the external drivers and your vision as senior manager in the university?
Do you feel that there is consistency between the external drivers and the vision of the senior management team generally within the university?
I've read the circular from the HEFCW related to learning and teaching strategies for 2007 onwards. How influential was the circular compared to the strategic direction that Celtic University wished to go?
What is your understanding of student-centred learning?
Is this congruent with the learning and teaching strategy? Or not?
What was the process of putting the last learning and teaching strategy together? Consultative process and what it offered. Do you feel that there was / is buy in from staff re L&T strategy?

What do you think about the mechanisms that drive the L&T Strategy in Celtic University? Effective or not?
How do you know whether it is succeeding or not?

Appendix 3: Two broad perspectives on student-centred learning used as prompt for discussion

Student-centred learning means putting students at the centre of everything we do and designing learning around their needs
Student-centred learning means empowering students to take responsibility for their own learning

Appendix 4: Ideas around empowerment used for discussion in interviews

(adapted from Whetton *et al.*, 2000)

Self-efficacy	What activities encourage a belief in students that they have the ability to perform the task? What activities encourage students that they have the capacity to develop to meet new challenges? How are complex tasks presented to and managed in the learning environment? Do students get opportunities to see others wrestling with (and succeeding) challenging tasks?
Self-determination	Where do students gain a sense of ownership for the activities in which they are involved? How much freedom do students have to try out new ideas, take the initiative, make decisions?
Personal control	How much are students encouraged and enabled to influence the environment in which they are studying? How much and in what way are students encouraged and enabled to influence the way that they are working? If students work in groups, how do these operate in terms of selection, management, outcomes? How is the teams' work presented? How much and in what way are students encouraged and

	enabled to influence the work itself?
Meaning	How is a sense of value and purpose of the activities in the programme developed? Do you feel the purpose is congruent with students' aspirations?
Trust	Where and how is a sense of trust developed between you and students, so that they are confident they will be treated equitably, fairly? Is information/ resource between you and students, and within the student group provided freely?

Appendix 5: Information sheet for research participants for main part of study

Please note: identifying information has been removed and replaced by descriptors in italics.

Celtic University

October 2009

Celtic University* ethics reference number: *(reference number)

Title of the project: Student centred learning: a qualitative study of conceptions of student-centred learning of academic staff.

Dear Research Participant

I am undertaking research into student-centred learning as part of a research project for the Doctorate in Education at Open University. I am writing to invite you to participate, however you are under no obligation to do so, and participation or non-participation will have no bearing on any future working relationship with the researcher.

The research concerns approaches to teaching that academic staff may take, and the factors that influence these approaches. This may influence future decisions I make within my role as *programme director for post-graduate programme*, and in the wider

academic development context. Participation in the research may provide you with an opportunity to reflect on aspects of teaching that you might not have otherwise done.

If you agree to participate, you will be sent an advance question by email to consider and respond to prior to the interview.

Then I wish to interview you for 30-45 minutes in a private space at a time and place convenient to you. The interview will be semi-structured with questions (about 10) relating to your experiences as a member of the teaching staff at *Celtic University*. You have been invited because you work within a small discipline group that I wish to investigate for the research.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maximised through the following: the interviews will be conducted in a private space approved by you. They will be recorded and saved in digital format on my PC for which only I have log on access, and will be stored for the duration of the Doctorate, after which time they will be deleted. Transcriptions or notes will be taken from the recordings; these will be anonymised. Anonymised data will be used for the Doctorate, and because of my role in academic development in *Celtic University* may also be used to inform other development projects as part of my professional practice.

You will be asked to give informed consent and will need to sign a consent form. Consent forms will be stored in my locked filing cabinet to preserve anonymity and will be retained for five years after the completion of the Ed D. You are not obliged to participate, and are free to withdraw at any time. I may wish to follow up with another interview at a later date, but you are under no obligation to participate even if you have consented to this interview cycle.

Following analysis of the interview data, you will be invited to participate in another 30-45 minute interview to verify your first responses, and to explore the issues more fully. You will also be invited to join a focus group with others who have also been interviewed. You will be asked for informed consent again at both these stages.

If you want further information, please contact me or my supervisor at the contact number/ email address below.

Sue Tangney, principal researcher, *(phone number and email address)*

(Supervisor's name and contact details)

Appendix 6: Information sheet for senior manager

Please note: identifying information has been removed and replaced by descriptors in italics

Celtic University

October 2009

Celtic University* ethics reference number: *(reference number)

Title of the project: Student centred learning: a qualitative study of conceptions of student-centred learning of academic staff.

Dear Member of Senior Management Team

I am undertaking research into student-centred learning as part of a research project for the Doctorate in Education at Open University. I am writing to invite you to participate, however you are under no obligation to do so, and participation or non-participation will have no bearing on any future working relationship with the researcher.

The research concerns approaches to teaching that academic staff may take, and the factors that influence these approaches. This may influence future decisions I make within my role as *programme director for post-graduate programme*, and in the wider

academic development context. Participation in the research may provide you with an opportunity to reflect on aspects of policy development that you might not have otherwise done.

I wish to interview you for 30 minutes in a private space at a time and place convenient to you. The interview will be semi-structured with questions (about 8) related to the strategies associated with learning and teaching in *Celtic University*. The purpose of this interview is to frame aspects of *Celtic University* strategy with respect to learning and teaching in the subsequent interviews with staff.

I will then conduct interviews with academic staff, and after the analysis, I may wish to interview you again to give you the opportunity to respond to responses and conclusions from the data analysis.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maximised through the following: the interviews will be conducted in a private space approved by you. They will be recorded and saved in digital format on my PC for which *only I have* log on access, and will be stored for the duration of the Doctorate, after which time they will be deleted. Transcriptions or notes will be taken from the recordings; these will be anonymised. Anonymised data will be used for the Doctorate.

You will be asked to give informed consent at each occasion and will need to sign a consent form. Consent forms will be stored in my locked filing cabinet to preserve anonymity and will be retained for five years after the completion of the Ed D. You are not obliged to participate, and are free to withdraw at any time.

If you want further information, please contact me or my supervisor at the contact number/ email address below.

Sue Tangney, principal researcher, *(contact phone number and email address)*

(Supervisor's name and contact details)

Appendix 7: Consent form for staff research participants

Please note: identifying information has been removed and replaced by descriptors in italics.

Celtic University

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Celtic University* Ethics Reference Number: *(reference number)

Participant name:

Title of project: Student centred learning: a qualitative study of conceptions of student-centred learning of academic staff.

Name of researcher: Sue Tangney

Participant to complete this section. Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated October 2009 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason without my relationship with *Celtic University*, or my legal rights being affected.

3. I agree to be contacted in the future by the researcher who may wish to invite me to participate in follow up studies to this project. Participation will be voluntary.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Signature of participant ..... **Date** .....

Name of person taking consent ..... **Date** .....

Signature of person taking consent .....

Appendix 8: Information sheet for student focus groups

Please note: identifying information has been removed and replaced by descriptors in italics

Celtic University

November 2010

Celtic University* ethics reference number: *(reference number)

Title of the project: Student centred learning: a qualitative study of conceptions of student-centred learning of academic staff in art and design.

Dear Student

I am undertaking research into student-centred learning as part of a research project for the Doctorate in Education at Open University. I am writing to invite you to participate, however you are under no obligation to do so, and participation or non-participation will have no bearing on your course.

The research is looking at approaches to teaching that academic staff may take, and the factors that influence these approaches. I have already interviewed a number of staff from art and design and now would like to get your views on some of the comments I have collected so far. Participation in the research may give you the opportunity to think about learning in a different way, and also to provide your own perspective.

If you agree to participate, I will talk to you in a focus group of about 4-5 students for about 45 minutes in a private space at a time and place convenient to you. The discussion will be semi-structured with questions (about 10-12) relating to your experiences as a student so far.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be maximised through the following: the focus groups will be conducted in a private space approved by you. They will be recorded and saved in digital format on my PC for which only I have log on access, and will be stored for the duration of the Doctorate, after which time they will be deleted. Transcriptions or notes will be taken from the recordings; these will be anonymised. Anonymised data will be used for the Doctorate, and because of my role in academic development in *Celtic University* may also be used to inform other development projects as part of my job. Your name will not appear publicly at any stage.

You will be asked to give informed consent and will need to sign a consent form. Consent forms will be stored in my locked filing cabinet to preserve anonymity and will be retained for five years after the completion of the Ed D which is the requirement. You are not obliged to participate, and are free to withdraw at any time.

If you want further information, please contact me or my supervisor at the contact number/ email address below.

Sue Tangney, principal researcher, *(contact phone number and email address)*

(Supervisor's name and contact details)

Appendix 9: Consent form for student focus groups

Please note: identifying information has been removed and replaced by descriptors in italics.

Celtic University

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

***Celtic University* Ethics Reference Number:**

Participant name:

Title of project: Student centred learning: a qualitative study of conceptions of student-centred learning of academic staff in art and design.

Name of researcher: Sue Tangney

Participant to complete this section. Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated November 2010 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason without my relationship with *Celtic University*, or my legal rights being affected.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

Signature of participant ..... Date .....

Name of person taking consent ..... Date .....

Signature of person taking consent .....

Appendix 10: Prompts used to conduct focus groups with students

	Questions for student focus groups
1	Have you heard the term student-centred learning? What do you understand by it?
2	What do you see as your responsibilities as a learner? What are teachers' responsibilities? How has this changed since school? During your degree course? What aspects are particular to art and design?
3	Many staff have said that student-centred learning is about handing over responsibility for learning to you. What is your response to this? In what way do you think this has happened from your point of view? Are you comfortable with more responsibility? What has prompted you to take on that responsibility? Do you feel more empowered as a learner as a result? In what ways do you think you still need to develop in terms of responsibility?
4	How much have you been able to work independently/ make your own decisions about what you are learning/ projects you have been working on/ how you are learning? Do you feel the boundaries between you deciding and staff deciding (through the way the course is structured or more directly) have been appropriate for the level of study? Too much choice/not enough choice? Has this changed between first and second year? What has helped/ hindered this transition? Examples
5	Do you feel genuinely curious as a learner? How would you describe this? What enhances this curiosity? What has made a difference to your development as a learner?
6	Do you feel that you are learning something about yourself as a learner (rather than just learning in the subject)? In what way? (through PDP? Reflective diary?) How have you used this knowledge about yourself when approaching

	another task within the course? Outside the course? What has encouraged you to think about yourself as a learner? Some staff have said that they purposefully have tried to develop this. Can you identify aspects of the course/ interaction with staff that have made a difference?
7	One aspect of being a student in art and design is that you are working alongside peers, seeing their work and them seeing yours. Many staff talked about this as a particular aspect of learning in art and design, and some talked about the sensitivities that might be involved. What's it like working alongside peers? Can it be a bit daunting? How do you deal with this? How do staff respond to this? What would make it easier? Or does it help with your learning? in what way? [e.g. seeing/ hearing how others thinking/ working]
8	What do you consider is the best description of staff on your course (and to what degree)? Teachers? Mentors? Fellow artists? In what way if at all do you feel that there is a community feel to the relationship between students and staff? How has the course changed your identity (if at all)? In what way? How has this happened?
9	In what way do you feel the course is building your capacity to go on developing yourself in your chosen field after you leave university? How confident do you feel about this?
10	Any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 11: An example of coding of interview transcripts

ROBERT

Researcher: I get the feeling from your statement and the course documentation that a lot of the teaching you do on the course is about the workshop environment?

Robert: yes, it's about the physical delivery and the relationship with processes and how processes meet creativity. So that it is that interface for the student, being part of the material arts so a significant part of it is about understanding the materials and process and how that relates to people's creative ambition, and then conceptual values towards that so it's always trying to mediate that, and most of my delivery is studio practice modules and technical modules.

Comment [S1]: Teaching skills

Comment [S2]: Linking skills with creativity

Comment [S3]: Creative aspirations

Comment [S4]: Abstracting ideas

It's interesting talking to (programme manager) and about our response to the question about student-centred learning, and so her perspective is so much through your point of delivery and what scl means, and so for (PD) it is the seminar groups where people take much more ownership over their creative context as well and that has given them a lot of impetus and a lot of value. So it is really interesting talking to you about this.

Comment [S5]: Student-centred learning at point of delivery (Mary)

Comment [S6]: Student-centred learning as ownership (Mary)

Researcher: yes well that is what interested me too and why I have decided to talk to staff about it .....

Robert - One thing that gives me an interesting insight is when we have students especially pg students who have come from a particular pedagogic style, where they might be prodigies of their master or their master will have a certain style and they will be shown a certain way of working and they will emulate that way of working. So much of what we do and the culture that produced us I suppose is a student centred teaching culture by coming across contacts with people who have had those experiences I think that gives an awareness of what it is that we deliver in terms of something 'from our culture'

Comment [S7]: Mimicking

Comment [S8]: Master – apprentice

Comment [S9]: Highlights the counter narrative to master-apprentice

Comment [S10]: Using arrival point of students to reflect as teacher and on course itself; recognising prior knowledge

Researcher – so you're saying that your learning wasn't done in a master apprentice culture, but some students come...

Robert: no, more so than we deliver cos we are more student centred than the culture where I think you..... whereas I was in a stronger craft aspect to it, whereas we have a more fine art bias in what we deliver but more transferred over [4.06]to individual about contextualising themselves.

Comment [S11]: SCL as rejection of atelier method

Comment [S12]: Student-centred learning as student ownership, own interpretation, freedom of choice

Appendix 11: An example of coding of interview transcripts

Researcher – has this changed over the last few years?

Robert: I think we cover a wider range of options but I think the fine art aspect of the spectrum challenges students more conceptually, and so they know their conceptual territory more clearly. So people who are working as designers , they are as thorough and as disciplined as they need to be in order to create successfully within that area, whereas I think there is a danger within our sector where maybe there's been too much wooliness so scl especially through the elements of seminar delivery have kind of, they are really there to challenge and provoke and make people clear about the judgments that they make about placement of themselves as practitioners and how they see themselves professionally, projecting themselves.

Comment [S13]: Student-centred learning as student interpretation and explicit recognition of this

Comment [S14]: Overall about explicitness of purpose

Comment [S15]: Encouraging/ challenging students to consider themselves in the wider context of the art community

Comment [S16]: Student-centred learning as self promotion

Researcher – yes you have said that in your learning statement about students being able to develop, and them taking their own direction,

Comment [S17]: Students leading themselves, choice

Robert – and empowered technically to be able to make those judgments and deliver on that as well. Some courses you see a lot of creative potentials but disempowered in terms of finding an interface and a process to be able to deliver that so you can remove the notion of scl if you have people really creatively vibrant but not giving them the tools to articulate.

Comment [S18]: Students having enough technical know-how to use it creatively and purposefully

Comment [S19]: Student-centred learning combination of technical and creativity in this environment

Researcher – looking at LO, in level 1, there are LOs about getting to know (the material, the processes) how do students actually engage with this?

Robert – [describes introducing students to materials] my favourite project ... speaking about knowledge and understanding (of the material), it's so important that it's not just (qualities of the material), students are asked to bring something (related to the material) when they come to uni, and we (experiment with it) and have lectures next to it about the properties and students see the nature of the material . [9.55]. It goes a long way to inform, it's a cultural thing as well, in the second year we have a lot of people who are very passionate about it and going out wider and doing broader studies sourcing material, it's very much in our culture of the now and people's mindfulness of ecology and how we are not just receiving things in processed goods, but actually going out and finding things and using them. It is important at a conceptual level as well as practical understanding, so studio practice and technical and theoretical, we are always looking for an integrated experience for the student. I have seen some projects where students have used materials from their local area and so it has the

Comment [S20]: experimenting

Comment [S21]: CONSTRUCTIVIST

Comment [S22]: ? Connecting with roots, ? connected to ideas of identity

Appendix 11: An example of coding of interview transcripts

potency of the material and the location, for some reason it is about the applied art perspective relative to that and so it can be that they move onto completely different territory.

Researcher – ... what about 'developing aesthetic judgments..'

Robert –it's really just to look at some provocation to say what do you value and what you don't value. So I expect those judgments to be very different to each other, some might be excited by the (reaction of the material) but hopefully they understand why it's done that, but kind of making aesthetic values based on judgment, and thinking about if you were making a sculptured form I could use it in a textured way, to actually see some creative potentials beyond the data presented

Comment [S23]: CONSTRUCTIVIST

Comment [S24]: Creating dissonance

Comment [S25]: Engaging with discourse

Comment [S26]: SOCIO-CULTURAL

Comment [S27]: Able to exercise self-responsibility , empowering

Comment [S28]: Making judgment about discipline itself, ? consciousness raising

Comment [S29]: Developing students' way of thinking

Comment [S30]: Creating environment where above is so

Researcher – ... so in the studio work in year 2, the learning outcomes are similar as you go through all the studio practice modules, how do you 'develop students' personal focus and able to think independently'

Robert – what we have for that is second year group tutorials, where there are opportunities for students to share data, a lot of show and tell, so students are making judgments, and working ideas through in their studio practice but also seeing what others are doing. I would expect quite a lot of cross-over. We try to mix these groups up so they are not always locked in and the same ten or so in the group. They are working through this studio practice but also making connections so we have (samples of work processes) and samples of work where students are evolving certain values in their work, and talk about how particular surfaces are formed (from models we have) and the potentials of them relative to what they are making. [13.20] so hopefully adding more knowledge but at the same time helping them think about what they really want to make , with these things as well, and I think it really shows itself like last week I was doing the formative assessments on this module and year on year I am so impressed with the commitment of the students and I think they really value the opportunity as well , the 20 credit module runs through from October to March and they value the opportunity to, say today, I am not going to get involved in studio practice so much, I will get involved in the technicalities of making these surfaces and it means maybe using a different side of your brain to develop things so they can do something quite systematically and develop qualities that are not so much about kind of pushing themselves creatively and exploring creative outcomes but then hopefully running parallel and ultimately diverging.

Comment [S31]: Making judgments about self, experimenting with ideas, seeing others' work, seeing others' thinking

Comment [S32]: CONSTRUCTIVIST; SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST

Comment [S33]: Developing own ideas, principles,

Comment [S34]: Weighing up options

Comment [S35]: Decision making

Comment [S36]: Creating environment where responsibility is with student

Comment [S37]: Time management, management of the creative process including technical time/ creative time

Comment [S38]: The how and why of the creative process

Comment [S39]: Creating an environment where choice to discover how and why is explicit